

# **Irish Children and Teenagers in a Changing World**

**By**

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## **Dedication**

**To Emma, Suz, Mags, Claire, Lizzie, Conor and Eoin- with love**

To the 33,828 young people who took part in *Write Now* – with hope

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## **Chapter 1: Young people in Irish Society: Context and Key Concepts**

### **Introduction**

Irish society is in a period of rapid economic, social and cultural change, involving dramatic increases in married women's participation in paid employment; in births to women outside marriage; in participation in higher education; in the increased visibility of younger women's higher levels of educational participation and superior educational achievements (Smyth and Hannan, 2000; O'Connor, 1998a; Lynch, 1999); and in a series of scandals involving abuses of authority in a number of male dominated institutions (Tovey and Share, 2003; O'Connor, 1998a and 2000a and b; O'Toole, 2003). It is a society where the traditional bulwarks of social control, such as the institutional Roman Catholic Church and tightly knit neighbourhoods with authoritarian family structures are crumbling. It is an increasingly globalised, individualised and materialistic society, where expectations as regards consumption and pleasure are high. Gender in this society remains an important but frequently unacknowledged reality, reflected in ways of doing boy/girl and in the evaluation of such performances. In this book we are concerned with young people's accounts of their ties to family and friends, their life styles, their discourses about time and space including their hopes and dreams for the future, within the overall context of issues related to individualisation, to the global and the local and ways of doing boy/girl. It draws on a unique national data written by young people typically aged 10-12 years and 14-17 years. Devlin (2006:54) work has suggested that young people are frequently depicted by the media and a variety of other institutions in Ireland, as indeed in other Western societies, as 'people who *have* problems or people who *are* problems', that is as people who are either involved in criminal or violent behaviour or who are seen as victims or in some way as vulnerable. This perception has frequently been inadvertently reinforced by a focus in much of the literature on young people whose behaviour or social environment is problematic in some way (Nolan, 2000; Kelleher et al, 2000). However parents and many of those who work with or

meet young people see such perceptions as very limited and stereotypical. Hence the importance of a study that explores the accounts of wide ranging sample of young people. In analysing these accounts, there is no attempt to pathologise the young people who wrote them, but rather to present such accounts in an academically intelligible way while retaining the vivid reality of such young people's voices. In the context of a rapidly changing society, such accounts are seen as important in their own right, as well as being a kind of litmus text of the extent to which Ireland has become a late modern society.

Giddens (1991:64) has defined globalisation as 'the intensification of world wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa'. The most obvious manifestations of this globalised world are the global media including the internet and the visible reality of global capitalism. Ireland has been identified for a number of years as the most globalised country in a ranking of 62 countries (which together account for 85 per cent of the world's population: O'Toole, 2003). Globalisation in Ireland has been facilitated by substantial structural funds received in the late 1980s and 1990s from the European Union (O'Toole, 2003; O'Connor, 1998a) as well as US influence, with 25 per cent of all new US investment in the EU since 1993 coming to Ireland –eight times its parity share given its population. Such influences have been reflected in and reinforced by the increasing penetration of Irish society by privately owned media conglomerates (providing tabloid newspapers and Sky television channels: Devereux, 2003). A tradition of very high levels of emigration also created a Diaspora that in turn became an important contributor to globalisation (Gray, 2004). Thus, global influences at the economic, legal, technological and cultural level have increasingly been very much a part of Irish life (ODTR, 1998; CSO, 2003). However in a small society of just over four million people, size is conducive to a strong degree of localisation reflected in and reinforced by embeddedness within a network of social ties. The importance of such ties at a financial and political level has been revealed in a series of Tribunals which have highlighted the ambiguities surrounding the definition of public and private; and the possibilities of corruption in a culture where

‘putting in a good word’ and ‘being helpful to your own’, effectively involves unfair treatment of those who are not ‘your own’ (whether this is defined in terms of family, political loyalty or geographical location).

With a small number of notable exceptions (such as Inglis, 2003), little attention has been paid to the increasing individualization of Irish society. Inglis did see it as a crucially important process in Ireland in the second half of the twentieth century, although he was particularly concerned with the shift from what he called ‘a Catholic culture of self-denial to a consumer culture of self indulgence’ (2003:138). Thus as he saw it, from the 1960s onwards ‘a new philosophy of liberal individualism and self indulgence’ began to emerge with ‘a new ethic of self realisation’ (ibid:137). He noted that it was Irish women particularly who were struggling: ‘to find a new language and way of thinking, writing and talking about themselves’ (ibid: 140); ‘They knew intuitively how years of domination, marginalization and oppression had been written into the bodies and minds of Irish women. They listened, and told stories, to each other. ....They distanced themselves from how traditional males expected them to behave’ (ibid: 141). For Inglis, self development and women’s education were ‘part of a feminist struggle to reconstitute the way Irish women knew and understood their world’ (ibid: 140/141) and hence were crucially important in the process of individualisation.

The fact that this theme has been relatively neglected by Irish sociologists is arguably not unrelated to their neglect of a focus on gender (O’Connor, 2006a). Thus in a society where a male hegemonic narrative is reflected in both structural and cultural work, it is arguable that the relevance of individualisation is less apparent. Although studies have not yet been done on ‘make-overs’ and life coaching, it is striking that media coverage of these topics has predominantly featured those in some way outside the dominant discourse (such as for example single/separated women, lone mothers). The neglect, until very recently, of studies of ‘ordinary’ people has further inhibited a focus on the cultural process of individualisation amongst those concerned

with cultural change and identity politics. On the other hand, amongst those concerned with structural studies of inequality and neo-liberalism, the focus is on a critique of an 'individualistic, competitive, acquisitive culture' (Kirby et al, 2002; see also Baker et al, 2004; Lynch, 1999). Hence, for various reasons, Irish sociologists, with a few notable exceptions, have paid little attention to one of the most fundamental long term processes transforming Irish society (i.e. individualisation).

Ireland experienced very high levels of emigration and overall population decline from the mid nineteenth century to the 1990s. Within this social context, Irish people's evaluation of their own culture has been low. Thus, Brody (1974) in his study of the west of Ireland in the late 1960s and early 1970s highlighted the cultural demoralisation consequent on high levels of emigration from that area to the most advanced capitalist countries and the attempt to come to terms with that. To be demoralised he suggested was: 'to lose belief in the social advantages or moral worth of their own small society' (Brody, 1974:16). In such a society, sustained by emigrants' remittances and inflated reports of social and sexual freedom, of opportunities and of economic success elsewhere: 'life at home is compared with life abroad as it is imagined to be' (ibid: 9); 'What is bad at home is, in the imagining, just the thing that life in London will be without' (ibid:12). Up to the 1990s, Irish society emerged particularly unfavourably from this comparison, with individualisation, a challenging of patriarchal control and higher standards of living being seen as the defining characteristics of the 'good life' and being unavailable in Ireland: 'the culture admired and explored by Yeats and Synge, is transformed by association with another kind of life. Consciousness has been restructured and life has been re-evaluated' (ibid:14).

Such negative societal evaluation is popularly believed to have been transformed by Ireland's recent economic success. Such success has seen Ireland since the mid 1990s outperforming its European counterparts in terms of economic growth- and hence being dubbed the Celtic Tiger, although growth rates since the turn of the century



have slowed down from nine per cent to 4-5 per cent. Such rapid economic growth has been associated with massive changes in life styles and expectations. It has however occurred in a context where state infrastructure (such as roads and child care facilities) has not kept pace with such developments. Thus considerable pressure has been put on individuals, families and communities in their attempts to reconcile paid work with family responsibilities although there is evidence that domestic labour and child care is still overwhelmingly being undertaken by women (McGinnity et al, 2005). At the same time, family life itself has been changing- partly reflecting such changes and also partly reflecting the steady decrease in family size; the increasing value attached to children, and their increasing individualisation within the family, as reflected in differentiated lifestyles and time scheduling.

However, in Irish society, arguably because of the strength of the constitutional support for the family as a whole, until relatively recently, children have been seen as members of families rather than as a collectivity with particular needs and issues. Thus Curtin and Varley (1984:42) concluded that in the early 1980s families ‘could hardly....be described as child-centred....Children are not wanted as an end in themselves, but always as a means of providing generational continuity on the farm, of supplying farm labour, or of acting as a hedge against old age’. Even by the mid 1990s, it was noted that there had been ‘more discussion about the constitutional rights of the unborn child than about those of the ‘born’ child (Greene, 1994:364). Nevertheless, Article 12 (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by Ireland in 1990) is particularly concerned with the right of young people less than 18 years to have their views heard in relation to the actions that affect them. Even yet however at a societal level, children are seen very much in the context of the family, with little recognition of their individual rights, or indeed of the possibility that their rights might conflict with those of their parents.

The launch of The Children’s Strategy (Government Publications, 2000) was an attempt to articulate a more contemporary view. This Strategy identified a series of goals that rested on a perception of children as an important element in civic society

in their own right. In particular it legitimated the importance of listening to young voices so as to devise effective public policy in their connection. A number of steps have been made since then to facilitate this (e.g. the establishment of Dail na nOg in 2001, with local Comhairle na nOg being established by the County and City development boards; focus groups with children and young people being set up as a way of exploring how such views could be obtained and incorporated most effectively: Mc Cauley and Brattman, 2002). The initiation of the first longitudinal study of children (2006) by the Economic and Social Research Institute and Trinity College Dublin and funded by the state and the compilation of all quantitative published data on children and young people into a *State of the Nation's Children, Ireland 2006* publication (Hanafin, et al, 2007) can be located in this context. In addition a review of Ireland's performance in the context of the Government's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has been undertaken by the National Children's Office (2005). However relatively little public interest has been shown in such attempts to ensure that children's rights, their contribution to services and their capacity to participate in the wider society is recognised. Indeed as Devlin (2005:168) has suggested, the public discourse has continued to pathologise them, seeing them 'as either deviant and criminal on the one hand or vulnerable victims on the other'.

Historically, the institutional Roman Catholic Church and the State have been important in creating differentially valued gender discourses, which have persisted despite the efforts of The Women's Movement in the 1970s and which underpin the ongoing 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 1995a/1987 and 1995b) accruing to men in, for example, the economic system, the state and the institutional church (O'Connor, 1998a and 2000a). Such differential valuation sits uneasily with a context where women have traditionally had higher educational levels than men as well as having a position of considerable emotional importance in the home. This tension is heightened by the changing position of women and particularly the increasing participation of married women in paid employment. Up to 1973, a Marriage Bar (O'Connor, 1998a) existed legally prohibiting married women from participation in a number of areas of

paid employment, combined with negative attitudes to married women's participation in all areas so only 7 per cent of married women were in paid employment in the early 1970s. By the early 1980s, this had risen to 17 per cent. However, this situation has changed dramatically with female employment rates rising to 43 per cent in 1996 and to 58 per cent in 2005 (CSO, 2006). Irish women's participation in paid employment is now above the average for the twenty-five countries in the EU (CSO, 2004). Roughly half of all married women and almost two thirds of those aged 20-44 years whose youngest child is aged six or more are now participating in paid employment (Devine et al, 2004; CSO, 2004). Furthermore, gender role attitudes supportive of wives and mothers' participation in paid employment have increased substantially over the period (Whelan and Fahey, 2004; Fahey et al, 2005a).

In this section we have looked briefly at the nature and extent of recent change in Irish society. Thus after a decade of economic depression and emigration in the 1980s, we have seen the emergence of the Celtic Tiger in the 1990s with increasing exposure to cultural globalisation; rapid increases in married women's participation in paid employment although differentially valued gendered discourses and life styles still persist within what purports to be an increasingly gender neutral society. In the next section it will be shown that these trends have been associated with increasing individualisation in the family, as reflected in differentiated life styles and preferences.

### **Childhood in a Changing Social and Cultural Context**

In this section we will look more specifically at childhood within a changing social and cultural context: a context that has also been stressed by Irish psychologists (Greene, 1994; Greene and Moane, 2000). Perhaps one of the most striking changes in young people's lives has been the increasing presence of what has been variously called 'cultural globalisation', 'Americanization' or 'cultural imperialism' (Lechner and Boli, 2004: 287) – much of this being driven by the mass media. Even though we think of this as being relatively recent, even in the early 1990s there were references to 'pulling children into a global culture where they may have more in common, in

terms of leisure pursuits and clothes and, perhaps, values, with the 1990's child in Urbana, Illinois than the 1950's child in Borris, Co Offaly' (Green, 1994: 364). Furthermore, to a degree to which Irish society has perhaps not fully appreciated, the global culture into which Irish children were being drawn was a highly individualistic consumerist one (Greene, 1994). The extent of such global influences in Ireland is partly reflected in TV ownership and viewing hours: ownership in Ireland exceeding 98 per cent of households and the viewing hours of Irish households being above the EU average (ODTR, 1998). Ownership of a household computer has also been increasing rapidly in Ireland: from 19 per cent of all households in 1998; to 32 per cent in 2000 to 42 per cent in 2003. Similarly, the percentage of households with Internet connections rose from five per cent in 1998; to 20 per cent in 2000; 34 per cent in 2003 and 45 per cent in 2005 (CSO, 2006). However the latter is still marginally below the average for the twenty-five countries in the EU (CSO, 2006).

In late modernity, it has been suggested that time and space becomes compressed. Traditional institutions are disembedded and are replaced by those that purport to be global, but may well simply be American. Watson (2004:132) has suggested that young people are avid consumers of what he called this 'transnational culture in all of its most obvious manifestations: music, fashion, television and cuisine'. He did not see this process as a passive one- arguing that the lifestyle into which these elements were absorbed was one 'where local people are consuming and simultaneously producing new cultural systems' (ibid). Since the crucial element is a focus on artefacts and experiences that are a product of time/space compression that reflects the process of globalisation, this is the concept used in this study. The suggestion that in globalised societies place 'becomes thoroughly penetrated by disembedding mechanisms' (Giddens, 1991:146) has been widely challenged. Thus it has been noted that this view obscures the significance of the local; underestimates variation in the meaning and assimilation of global products within particular cultural contexts and fails to recognise that global cultural products may be used to assert local cultural differences (Bennett, 2000; Paulgaard, 2002; Roth, 2002). Traditionally in an Irish context this has been reflected in and reinforced by locality based sporting

organisations and competitions, and by the institutional Roman Catholic parish system of worship and community based activities. Both of these seem likely to be increasingly under pressure in Ireland - the former by the trend towards the commuter based nature of family life (Corcoran et al, 2003) reflecting the cost of housing in inner city areas and the latter by the rapidly declining commitment of young people to institutionalised Roman Catholic church based activities. Hence the question of the extent to which cultural globalisation and/or localization is an important element in young people's experiences is an important issue.

Ireland is unusual in European terms in having the highest proportion of young people under the age of 18 years (over 1million or 25 per cent of the total population as compared with a EU 25 average of just under 20 per cent: Hanafin et al, 2005). This can be located in the context of a long standing tradition of high birth rates-although in the 1990s it seemed as if that pattern was in long term decline with the number of births falling to its lowest level in the mid 1990s (National Children's Office, 2005). However birth rates have risen since then, a pattern partly related to the ending of the 1980s pattern of out migration of young people and partly to strong economic growth rates since then. Paradoxically then, total fertility rates at 1.95 in Ireland are the highest in the EU 25 (and compare with an average there of 1.5: CSO, 2006) despite little state support for combining paid work and family.

Traditionally Irish families have been large (Devine et al, 2004). However the family context in which Irish children are now raised has changed very substantially with less than one in five children under 15 years being reared in families with five or more children. On the other hand, more than half of such children under 15 years are being reared in families with one or two children (National Children's Office, 2005). This has potentially dramatic consequences for children's lives, including the possibility of greater adult attention and individualisation. Furthermore, although there is a paucity of hard evidence, it is widely acknowledged that children's lives at least in urban areas are increasingly scheduled with a proliferation of sport and activity camps during vacation periods such as the Summer and Easter school holidays ( Devine et al

2004)- such patterns arguably reflecting the dramatic increase in mothers participation in paid employment (see last section).

The dramatic increase in births outside marriage has added a further dimension, with roughly one in five families with children under 15 years now being headed by lone parents (overwhelmingly lone mothers) for at least some period of time, arguably reducing patriarchal control in the household. Women's experience of such lone parenthood is not a teenage one in that only a minority of such births are to women under 20 years (and this proportion has been declining). On the other hand, the proportion of births to women aged 30-35 years outside marriage has doubled since the 1990s. Thus clearly lone parenthood although it is a transitory phenomenon, is overwhelmingly not a teenage phenomenon. Furthermore, it is at least plausible to suggest that the patriarchal position of men in reconstituted families is less secure, since the possibility that women will ally themselves with their children against such authority cannot be eliminated. The fact that, to date, the State has provided financial support to Lone Parents on condition that a partner is not living in the household has paradoxically exacerbated this situation.

In a wider societal context where authority is being challenged and abuses of (mainly patriarchal) power daily highlighted, it is not perhaps surprising that children should be critical of the hierarchical relationships in which they are involved. Thus, Devine (2002) showed that children as young as 7-11 years in First Level schools were aware of the exertion of power in their day-to-day school lives through timetabling and the wider hierarchical school system. Both Devlin (2006) and Lynch and Lodge (2002) vividly outlined young people's attitudes to what they saw as the unequal and disrespectful culture in Second Level schools. Interestingly the latter found that girls in all girls' schools were most likely to complain about this: a pattern that they saw as unsurprising since such schools were most likely to have systematic procedures for controlling dress, use of jewellery, make up etc. However it seems equally plausible to suggest that such patterns may also reflect the lack of legitimacy attached to female power within a society where maleness is a key component of authority.

Despite the very considerable changes in Irish society, there is indirect evidence of the persistence of the differential evaluation of boys and girls, and the internalisation of such attitudes by young people. In a rural highly patriarchal society, the preferences for boys was reflected in and reinforced by a cultural obsession with the continuity of the name on the land (Curtin and Varley, 1984). More recently De Roiste and Dinneen (2005) found that in their extensive survey of 12-18 year olds, just over half of the girls but three quarters of the boys were happy with the way they looked –the difference between them increasing with age. Thus 85 per cent of the 17-year-old young men were happy with this as compared with 54 per cent of the young women of the same age. Low levels of self esteem (both academic and physical) also emerged in Hannan et al's (1996) study and persisted even when class background and ability were controlled for. More recent studies have also shown that amongst 12-17 year olds, boys are almost twice as likely as girls to say that they always feel happy with the way they are (see Hanafin et al, 2007). It seems plausible to suggest that such patterns are reinforced by the differential treatment of boys and girls in the home (as reflected in arrangements involving pocket money and the performance of domestic activities: Mc Coy and Smith, 2004; Leonard, 2004b). Such patterns also arguably reflect a widespread lack of confidence, even amongst well-educated women in Irish society (Dorgan et al, 1994; O'Connor, 1995a). The persistence of such trends within such a rapidly changing society characterised by increasing economic success and cultural confidence is provocative. Furthermore, although women and girls are particularly likely to see themselves as having low cultural value, Irish young people aged 12-18 years old had on average a more negative self perception than young people in the UK, Poland, France, Spain, Germany, Austria, Greece, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland-their level of negative self perception being exceeded only by Hungarian young people in that study (see Hanafin et al, 2007). Such patterns raise fundamental questions about the persistence of an adult focussed patriarchal system.

The depiction and implications of such a culture for children has been most evident in literary accounts- including both autobiographical ones (for example, in Frank McCourt's 1996, *Angela's Ashes* and Nuala O'Faolain's 1998 *Are you Somebody?*)

and fictionalised ones (such as John McGahern's 1990 *Amongst Women* and Roddy Doyle's 1993 *Paddy Clarke Ha, Ha, Ha*). The starkness of the challenges in these books to adult male patriarchy has not generally been matched by sociological work—arguably reflecting greater self-censorship amongst sociologists in strongly male dominated academic and occupational structures (O'Connor, 2000 and 2001). This is not peculiar to the substantive area of childhood. Thus it has also been noted that writers and dramatists consistently depicted Irish women as strong, coping and courageous, while Irish men were presented as weak, sometimes over-dependent on maternal approval and often as rather pathetic figures in a societal context that devalued women and reproduced male authority. Hence one might suggest that the cultural consequences of indicating that 'the king has no clothes' are more likely to be avoided by describing such challenges in literary rather than sociological texts.

### **Individualization and/or Structural embeddedness**

Beck (1992) suggested that individualization involves 'disembedding' (i.e. liberation from traditional contexts of dominance and support) and disenchantment (i.e. loss of traditional security as regards norms and practical knowledge). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: xxi/ii) focus on 'institutionalised individualism' so that 'individualization' means disembedding without re-embedding' as individuals '*seek biographical solutions to systemic contradictions*' (italics in original). For them such disembedding involving a weakening of the nation state, of class affiliation and of the traditional family 'liberation from traditional contexts of dominance and support'; a preoccupation with internal emotional states; a 'disenchantment' or a loss of traditional feelings of security as well as what Leccardi (2005) described as feelings of uncertainty surrounding the future; with broadly based social classifications being described as 'zombie categories' that have died yet still live on' (op cit., p 27). More specifically Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: 105) suggested that: 'Identity in late modernity is less and less an ascribed fate'. Theorists of late modernity have suggested that in such societies there is a turning inward, a pre-occupation with internal emotional states. This can be seen as reflecting a wider context where social and cultural structures are changing so rapidly that the meaning of such categories is



no longer clear. Hence it can be seen as occurring at the expense of identification with cultural positions (such as age or social class position), which can be seen as reflecting structural embeddedness. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim see such a context as ‘irrevocably and globally networked’ (op cit., 25). Thus, the combination of globalisation, detraditionalisation and individualisation created the context for ‘a life of one’s own’ - a life characterised by reflexivity, ‘inflated expectations’, ‘decreasing preparedness to obey commands’ and ‘the ethic of individual self fulfilment and achievement’, (op cit. p 26 and 22). They see the processes of individualisation (and globalisation) as ‘changing the foundations of living together’-and effectively as necessitating new forms of social structure and new bases for social organisation.

It is widely suggested that one of the features of late modernity is that time horizons contract: ‘*history shrinks to the (eternal) present*, and everything revolves around the axis of one’s personal ego and personal life’ as that the very process of releasing people from traditional ascribed roles for a life of their own, generated ‘the need for a shared inner life’ (Beck, 1992:135 and 105). This need he suggested ‘*grows with the losses that individualisation brings*’: ‘Not GOD, not priests, not class, not neighbours, well at least YOU. And the size of the YOU is the inverted emptiness that otherwise prevails’ (Beck, 1992:114). Romantic love and individually chosen friendships can be seen as ways of meeting this need for a shared inner life. They can be juxtaposed with more ascriptive kinds of social connectedness (Brannen et al, 2001) such as those related to references to relatives.

Amongst young people in this study, relationships with relatives are seen as reflecting structural embeddedness, while those with friends are seen as quintessentially individualised since they can be seen as reflecting Beck’s (1992) new kinds of social commitment and can, at least potentially, can transcend social contexts (although in fact the extent to which they do so is limited). In Ireland, with a small number of notable exceptions (Devine, 2003) we know relatively little about young people’s social and emotional lives. The HBSC survey found that 85 per cent of the 10-17 year olds said that they had three or more same sex friends, although it was also noted that

there was no indication of the quality of such relationships and that such patterns might reflect a social desirability bias (see Hanafin et al, 2007). Friends were mentioned by half of those in another study as the first place young people would go if they had a serious problem, such as stress, anxiety or depression (NYCI, 1998). Concepts of masculinity and femininity are related to and reflected in the kinds of friendship ties and the discourses around such relationships. Thus individualisation/structural embeddedness and doing boy/girl are interrelated.

A sense of global fragility and at riskness both at the global level and at the level of the individual can be seen as characteristic of post or late modernity (Beck 1992). Indeed, individual's experiences of fragmentation and inauthenticity can be compounded by powerlessness and feelings of threat at the global level. In this context, class and family support structures become less important, and the individual sees him/herself as being freer. However Beck highlighted the paradox that although the market, money, law, mobility, education etc, heighten possibilities as regards individualisation, they also effectively standardised the life course since in order to participate in the market, you need money; in order to get money, you need a job; in order to get a job, you need education. Thus they are more directly exposed to the vagaries of the state and the market with further risks existing at an environmental level.

Individualisation can also be reflected in attitudes towards time with an important aspect of individualisation being the disembedding of the life course and the substitution of a choice biography for a standard biography with life plans becoming 'the substantial content of the reflexively organised trajectory of the self' (Giddens, 1991: 85; see also Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Berger et al 1974). However, it has also been recognised that the profusion of choices can create anxiety especially in a context where the consequences of those choices are by no means obvious. In such a context as suggested by Giddens (1991), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) it can include both a focus on an extended present (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002), reflecting a fear of the future, or at the opposite extreme, it can include

seeing the future as something that must be planned. Although very different, both of these perspectives suggest an individualised approach to time. They differ from those that focus on a sense of time that implicitly stresses the individuals' embeddedness in wider structures where there are collectively defined temporal paths: whether these are related to the life course; to generational positioning; to an age cohort and/or to spatial arrangements.

A number of theorists (such as Beck, 1992, 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991) have suggested in late modern societies, the focus is on 'becoming' in a context where information and knowledge are being rapidly absorbed and revised in a complex and fast changing social and cultural milieu. The challenge is to create and re-create the self in a reflective way with the construction of the self-being seen as very much an open –ended process. For Giddens (1991: 53) 'Self identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits possessed by the individual. It is *the self as reflexively understood in terms of his or her biography*'. Renold (2004: 249) noted that: 'The more complex theorization of the gendering process has shifted from 'roles' that males and females 'learn' to an understanding of the forming of gender identities as relational, multiple, processual'. In this reflexive context, Giddens (1991:217) suggested that: 'What gender identity is, and how it is expressed, has become itself a matter of multiple options'. The implicit suggestion is that culturally hegemonic ways of 'doing boy/girl' (Haywood and Mac an Ghiall, 2003) have disappeared, and that individual agency is increasingly shown in constructing gender narratives. However although Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: xxiv; 203; 113) saw gender as 'part of a collective moulding of individual behaviour' that has been rendered obsolete, it was not consistently referred to as an outdated category-thus implicitly suggesting that it was possible that 'elements of a gender-specific socialisation' were still at work (see next section).

In contrast, a perception of identity that focuses on membership of particular groups or social categories (such as nationality, gender, ethnicity, age: Williams, 2000) is likely to be characteristic of a traditional slowly changing society, where positions

and roles are clearly defined and commonly understood and are relatively unchanging elements. In such societies key components may be so totally taken for granted that they are not reflected at all in individual's concepts of themselves. Thus for example, in an Irish context where educational institutions and the State frequently depict society as gender neutral, 18-30 year olds who were asked if they saw gender as making any difference to their future lives, overwhelmingly said that it would not do so (O'Connor et al, 2002a). Furthermore, the rhetorical degendering of occupational choices, in fact appears to conceal a valuing of male career choices (Clancy, 2001). The existence of such categorical elements in the identity can be seen as a reflection of structural embeddedness.

Thus in looking at individualisation/social embeddedness in these young people's accounts, the focus will be on a variety of indicators with, for example, references to choices, friends and to internal emotional states indicating individualisation, while references to family and to the categorical nature of their identity being seen as indicating structural embeddedness. There is also a focus on discourses about time. Individualisation with its stress on becoming and its implicit rejection of categorical identities such as gender implicitly raises issues about the nature of a gendered reality-a reality that has been increasingly reflected in a concern with doing boy/girl-the topic to which we now turn.

### **Doing Boy and/or Doing Girl**

It has been argued that we continually bring our gender identity into being by performing various kinds of behaviour (whether in our language, hobbies or ways of relating) that are culturally labelled masculine or feminine. In this way, we show ourselves and other people that we are a man/woman. In this 'performative concept' identity is constructed through doing activities that are seen in particular societies as feminine/masculine (Butler, 1990). The implication is that 'gender is not a 'thing' but a process, and one which is never finished' 'gender is 'something people 'do' or 'perform' as opposed to something they have' (Cameron, 1998:16/17). 'The 'performance' approach suggests ...that men and women use language as they do *in*

*order to be and be perceived as, gendered'* (Cameron, 1998: 17:italyics in original). Three broad traditions of work in this area have been identified: a 'deficit' approach which sees women as much the same as men but lacking certain key elements; the 'dominance' approach which highlights their subordinate position within the wider social and cultural context; and the 'difference' approach which stresses the sub-cultural differences between men and women (Cameron, 1998). Uchida (1998) argues that it really makes no sense to separate difference from dominance, since the overall cultural context is one of male dominance, and hence that implicit in difference is a higher evaluation of the dominant (male) attributes, life styles and values. Indeed Bjerrum Nielsen (2004a) showed that whether societies purported to endorse gender equality or complementarity, a positive valuation of womanhood did not exist nor a positive male role vis a vis women; while the United Nations (UN, 1995: 29) noted that 'no society in the world treats its women as well as its men'; that 'In no society today do women enjoy the same opportunities as men...' 'a widespread pattern of inequality between men and women persists'. The perspective adopted in this study is not an essentialist one, but rather what Evans (1995: 91) called a 'weak cultural feminist tradition' much of it stimulated by Gilligan's classic (1982) and widely critiqued work (see Stone, 1996). The roots of this idea can be traced back to de Beauvoir's (1972/1949) idea that one is not born a woman but that one becomes one. Thorne (1993:103) has been amongst those who have been critical of this 'different cultures' approach to boys and girls behaviour on the grounds that it neglected within-gender variation; was particularly likely to reflect the activities of the most dominant young people; and seemed to refer to what she called 'the symbolic (normative, ideological or discursive) dimensions of gender'. It is suggested that such criticisms miss the crucial point: viz. in so far as different ways of doing boy/girl are valued, gender is a socially constructed and culturally valued framework. It is precisely by understanding the extent to which particular ways of behaving are seen as valuable for boys/girls that we can begin to see the nature and extent of social pressure on individual boys and girls and their differential cultural evaluation. Within this perspective, 'boundary crossing' or undertaking activities which are normatively valued for the opposite sex is a very real possibility and as Thorne (1993) herself

recognised, offers insights into the differential value attached to doing boy/girl within particular social and cultural contexts.

In a society where gender reassignment surgery is possible, the relationship between biology and gendered behaviour is increasingly problematic, and the idea of an essential identity is increasingly problematised, so that a focus on gender as performance becomes increasingly intelligible. Such performances have been widely seen as including, but by no means being restricted to, lifestyles. Miles (2000:16) suggested that lifestyles was a useful concept for understanding young people's lives particularly in 'areas of social life, which are not perceived as having a direct relationship with social class (e.g. clothes; music etc) in what purports to be an increasingly individualised world'. This focus on lifestyle contrasts with the 1970s and 1980s where in the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham the main focus of attention was on youth subcultures, particularly those that were male and deviant or rebellious in some way (Thornton, 1997). This latter kind of perspective has come in for increasing criticism as young people's life styles are increasingly commodified in Western Society so that rather than resisting the dominant culture it has absorbed it. In this study there was a particular focus on the ways in which sport, the media and other sites for the construction of gender are differentially used in the accounts of their life styles- looking also at the extent to which global/local elements were involved in such ways of 'doing girl/boy'.

### ***Doing Boy***

Connell (2005:13) has suggested that: 'One of the most important circumstances of young people's lives is the gender order they live in. Masculinities are constructed, over time, in young people's encounters with a system of gender relations.' Thus implicit in his view is the idea that masculinities will vary across time and place. Boys create their lives individually and collectively through what he calls 'the configurations of practice associated with the social position of men' within a particular social and cultural context. Implicit in Connell's argument is a rejection of biological essentialism whether rooted in a focus on bodily differences or bodily

stages of development. As he sees it: 'The physical changes matter but they do not directly determine the experience of adolescence. That is a question of how social practices take hold of, and give meaning to, bodily change and bodily difference' (Connell, 2005: 14). He (1995: 76) also stressed that it was necessary to recognise what he called 'multiple masculinities' and the relationships between these. Thus, he distinguished between the form of masculinity that 'occupied a hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations' and which was 'culturally exalted'; those (such as homosexuality) that were culturally stigmatised and subordinated by various practices including violence and discrimination; those that were complicit –in the sense that they benefited from the patriarchal dividend and colluded with the benefits of hegemonic masculinity; and those that were marginalised in the sense that they were endorsed in subordinated class or ethnic groups (Connell, 1995b: 76-81). Thus it is apparent that for Connell, forms of masculinity are in a complex relationship not only with an individual's physique but also with their wider structural location. As he sees it 'the life histories of men are the main site for their construction' (Connell, 2005:13). Connell (2005:13) also suggested that in a society that stressed the differences between boys and girls behaviour, a common solution was hyper masculinity: 'When a society's dominant gender ideology insists on the absolute difference of masculinity from femininity, a developmental dilemma is created.... one common solution to this- though not the only one- is to exaggerate the enactment of masculinity as a way of 'doing difference'. However, Jagger (2002) found that in her study, only one tenth of the males were clearly operating with a laddish concept of masculinity, stressing drinking, football and a macho heterosexual concept of masculinity. It seems plausible to suggest that the proportion might be higher amongst Irish young men, at least as indicated by data on alcohol consumption. Thus the European School Survey Project on alcohol and drugs (Hanafin et al, 2007) involving data from 33 countries showed that over half of Irish 15 year olds had five or more drinks in a row at least once in the past month, making them the third highest in levels of binge drinking. Lifetime cannabis use has also been shown to be relatively high in international terms (ESPAD 2004 and HBSC, 2003). Concerns have also been expressed about Irish young people's levels of actual and attempted suicide rates (National Suicide Review

Group, 2004). Other than in the case of actual suicide, there was little gender difference in the Irish trends- implicitly suggesting that hypermasculinity was being endorsed not only by boys but by girls as well. On the other hand, since 'real life expressions of aggressiveness and toughness' in school were not associated with status or popularity amongst most boys and girls (see Lodge, 2005), these aspects of hypermasculinity seemed less likely to be common.

A focus on social practices and sites involved in the construction of masculinity is widely seen as key. Connell (2005:15) suggested that sport- particularly organised competitive team sport, was almost as important as sexuality as 'a site of masculinity formation- with football in particular being involved in 'the reproduction of conventional gender identities and definitions' (Willis, 1990:115). There is some evidence (Lodge and Flynn, 2001) that 10-13 years old boys were particularly likely to refer to football and other team-based sports. Connell also identified other sites including gendered consumption items; cross gender relationships; fatherhood or anticipated fatherhood and gender segregated employment settings. Ging (2005:47/48) focussed on the media and suggested that Irish boys in Second Level 'find in the mass media a potent source of references for constructing a repertoire of acceptable codes and signifiers of masculinity' so that the media effectively functioned as 'a manual of masculinity'. She noted that in that study ways of 'doing boy' were more rigid in the group discussions than in the individual questionnaires- prompting her to conclude that 'participants both critique and collude in the persistence of rigid constraints on their masculine identities' (Ging, 2005: 48). She also noted that while the media was typically used to reflect and reinforce male gender scripts, non-normative images of masculinity were most likely to exist when the young men's school year co-ordinators were strongly committed to gender issues (and they did not vary by geographical location, type of school or social class position). Hence, her work suggests that the kinds of images that young men expose themselves to, and the meaning of these images was not simply affected by the media itself; that hegemonic versions of masculinity are more likely to persist in group



discussions than in individual responses; and were most likely to reflect the existence of idiosyncratic social factors rather than structural realities.

Haywood et al (2005) recognised that there was no necessary relationship between boys and men's constructions of masculinity. Thus for example, although relationships with women in adulthood were a crucial element in masculinity, young boys see interest in girls as a sign of femininity. There is some evidence to suggest that the role of breadwinner is still an important definer of masculinity in Ireland (O'Connor et al, 2002a; Ni Laoire, 2005). However, married women's increasing participation in paid employment has put that role under pressure, although the continuing wage gap between men and women (CSO, 2006), at least potentially, facilitates men's ongoing construction of themselves in these terms. However in Ireland: 'In the stereotypical male gender role as 'career man', economic individualisation *and* masculine behaviour are joined together...Fatherhood held no obstacle to practicing a career; on the contrary it was a compulsion to do so' (Beck, 1992:114). Amongst Irish 18-30 year olds, both men and women suggested that women had to be more qualified and to work harder than men in Ireland to get promoted, while most of the young men did not see men as more competent than women but '*that's just the way things are*'. Thus, at one level the young men accepted the system was unfair to women, at another level they felt no responsibility to change it and in certain contexts did not see it as an issue (O'Connor et al, 2002a) with Beck suggesting that men were likely to simply practice a 'rhetoric of equality'.

Cleary (2005:157) noted that what she called 'binary gender divisions' were most obvious as regards the expression of emotion- with boys being encouraged not to reveal such emotions: the performance of hegemonic masculinity being seen as necessitating the absence of confiding and the denial of vulnerability. Her own work looking at young men who had attempted suicide found that many of them were unable or unwilling to confide in anyone because of fear of rejection, guilt or simply an inability to formulate such feelings. Such patterns can be seen as related to boy's educational experiences, which have been shown to be less focussed than girls' on

personal development (Baker et al, 2004). Ging (2005: 41) noted that although the young men she studied were critical of the pressures on boys to 'suppress emotion and act hard', they got a good deal of pleasure from what she called 'the performance of tough blokeish masculinity'. Jagger (2002) also found that only a very small minority of those in her study had 'new man' concepts of masculinity- stressing emotional sensitivity and caring.

In summary then it is suggested that masculinities are constructed within particular social and cultural contexts. Key sites such as sport, gendered consumption, cross gender relationships, fatherhood and anticipated fatherhood; gendered employment settings or the anticipation of these have been identified as important. There is relatively little evidence about the sites used by Irish boys, although Ging's work (2005) has highlighted the importance of media consumption; Cleary's work (2005) has focussed on the denial of vulnerability; while amongst men in their 20s to 40s the importance of providing economic support as breadwinner has continued (Ni Laoire, 2005; O'Connor et al, 2002a). There is a suggestion that hypermasculinity or blokeish masculinity is implicitly seen as attractive-and even in some circumstances, that it has become part of a hegemonic concept of masculinity, albeit that there is a suggestion that it is more likely to include self destructive rather than aggressive behaviour.

### ***Doing Girl***

It has been suggested (Jagger, 2001) that post-modern theories have not paid sufficient attention to gender in discussing identity, and this neglect has been particularly obvious as regards doing girl. However, Jagger suggested that the majority of the women 'continue to represent themselves in a relatively limited number of images', with physical attractiveness and nurturing remaining the key pivots. Thus she concluded that: 'although the possibilities of being a woman have been extended or enlarged, the recurring and repetitive meanings of femininity demonstrate the continuing strength of the binary division between male and female subjects' (Jagger, 2002: 50/51 and 55 respectively). The implications of such patterns are complicated by the fact that, as suggested by Baker Miller (1986) in her classic

work, very different values are attached by Western society to these activities: with her arguing that that devaluing the importance of relationships and connectedness diminished both men and women.

Connolly (2004) suggested that 'the sense that subjectivity is both scripted by and constitutive of ideology finds many echoes in Irish culture'. Irish women's constructions of the self have been located within an overall context of gender roles that stress service, self-sacrifice and subordination (O'Dowd, 1987; O'Connor, 1998a). There was indirect support from Irish girls' subject choices at University level that Irish women's constructions of themselves remain relational. Thus in a context where roughly one in two of those who do the Leaving Certificate go on to Higher Education, the areas where women constitute at least three quarters of the students are in the broadly person oriented 'caring' areas, such as Education, Medical Science and Social Science. In contrast, the area where men constitute a clear majority (i.e. more than three quarters) is Technology (Clancy, 2001).

In any case, Irish data has suggested that, even in 2,000, and despite women's high levels of participation in paid employment, cultural value is still seen as attaching to women's activities in the domestic arena. Thus roughly three fifths of both men and women agreed that: *'Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay'*. Since a focus on culinary expertise has never been a part of Irish culture, it seems plausible to suggest that such trends may reflect a yearning after women's traditional levels of authority in the domestic area; their role in maintaining personal relationships there; the difficulty of being promoted in the paid employment setting and/or of combining paid work and family responsibilities in a societal context that is deeply unhelpful.

It is striking that in Ireland positive attitudes to women's participation in paid employment increased amongst both men and women between 1990 and 2,000 (Whelan and Fahey 1994 and Fahey et al, 2005a: see Table 3) although such attitudes were still more common amongst the women than the men. In any case in 2,000 roughly three quarters of the men and women saw a job as *'the best way for a woman*

*to be an independent person*'; and roughly four fifths endorsed the view that *'husband and wife should contribute to household income'*. However, roughly a third still agreed that: *'A job is all right but what women really want is a home and children'* and that *'A pre-school child suffers if mother works outside the home'*. The implicit assumption that it is mothers who are the most important people in their children's lives was challenged when the majority of both agreed that fathers were *'as well suited to look after their children as mothers'* (an indicator that was not included in the earlier study).

The accounts of young people aged 18-30 years (O'Connor, 1998a and O'Connor et al, 2002a) offer some support for these views suggesting that the gendered patterns of housework and child care were seen as reflecting women's greater competence and responsibility. Amongst these respondents the idea of role reversal (with the man being responsible for the home and family) was seen as effectively impossible. However, in anticipation of the perceived difficulty of combining paid work and family responsibilities, the young women in that study advocated deferring having children; having some kind of payment provided by the state for such work, whether or not the woman was married as well as personal solutions such as juggling child care and family responsibilities. It has been suggested that young women were particularly likely to have expectations as regards gender equality- both as regards sharing domestic work and as regards their occupational lives (Beck, 1992) and thus to see the need for and possibility of a realignment within the worlds of unpaid and paid work.

Classic work by McRobbie and McCabe (1981) and Hudson (1984) suggested that having a boyfriend, spending time with him, pleasing him and giving him priority in their lives were seen as important in doing girl, while Beechey (1986) drew attention to the importance of glamour as an element in young women's ideas. Such ideas implicitly devalue friendships between women. More recently with a small number of notable exceptions, little attention has also been paid to the implications of these changes for ways of 'doing girl' at younger ages. Roche's (2005) work (dealing with

16- 18 year olds) illustrated the way in which young women juxtaposed the parameters of their own lives with those of their mothers. Gray's work (2004) suggested that: 'the category 'Irish women' .. produced a martyred relationship to the self, which they [the women in her study] identify with their mothers and refuse for themselves'. Lynch and Lodge (2002:130) suggested that 'To overtly challenge sexism is to ...become unfeminine'. However, Lodge and Flynn (2001: 190) noted that in their study of young students (typically aged 10-13 years) many tended to define themselves 'in ways which reflected traditional gendered expectations of behaviour, attitudes and characteristics'. A small number of young people, mostly girls, operated as 'boundary crossers' although this tended to reinforce the higher status of male activities. (Thus girls who displayed male patterns enjoyed higher status, while the opposite was true of boys who displayed female patterns). There has also been a suggestion (Lodge, 2004: 177) that exposure to global influences, such as the television programme *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, provided girls with 'an opportunity to explore different aspects of their gender identity, and push out the boundaries of what it means to be female' - since Buffy presented them with an image of femininity which was both powerful and which could be combined with a more traditional romantic discourse. Thus implicit in this work is the idea that although global elements may sometimes be used to reinforce stereotypical ways of doing girl, they may also be used to expand such boundaries.

In summary then, ways of 'doing girl' in Ireland still seemed to be influenced by a wider ideological context stressing relatedness- both as reflected in higher education choices (and ultimately in professions related to such choices) and in the valuation of the housewifely role. Furthermore, insofar as boundary crossing (Thorne, 1993) was more likely to occur in the case of girls than boys, doing boy was implicitly more highly valued. The media seemed to play a role in reflecting and reinforcing such boundary crossing (Lodge, 2004). However, open challenges to sexism were seen as unfeminine-although there was no evidence that subordination was a normative element in 'doing girl'.

## **The Present Study**

The social and cultural context then in which the young people in this study, born between 1982 and 1989, have grown up has been one of rapid economic, social and cultural change. During their lives the economy has moved from being the ‘sick man of Europe’ in the 1980s to the ‘Celtic Tiger’ in the 1990s; massive outward emigration in the 1980s has given way to inward migration; high levels of respect for authority has given way to an increasing awareness of corruption in the institutional church, the economic system and the State with this ‘melange of modernities and traditions’ being described as a ‘collision culture’ (Keohane and Kuhling, 2004: 7). In addition in terms of exposure to the globalising media as well as changes in family size and in the wider family context, Irish childhoods have arguably changed considerably, and are worth examining to day.

In this context, the creation of identity is seen as ‘a task, a mission, a responsibility’ ‘an overwhelming concern’, a ‘subjective challenge and an individual quest’ (Bauman, 1997:71; Sennett, 1977: 219 respectively). Giddens (1991: 5) has highlighted the importance of: ‘The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent yet continuously revised, biographical narratives’. Hence it is suggested that one of the possible sources of culturally created tension for young people in Ireland to day is that a biographical narrative can no longer be assumed to be collectively constructed and available at a taken-for-granted level. The challenge for each of them is to construct that narrative: a narrative that may still draw on ascribed characteristics such as age and gender and/or may feature ascriptive relationships, as opposed to focusing on individual choice and friendships.

Although the tenor of much of the literature suggests that such reflexivity is non-gendered, Giddens (1991:106) suggestion that women ‘experience the openness of late modernity in a fuller yet more contradictory way’ leaves open the possibility of gender differences (a possibility also implied by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Indeed, it has been suggested that women are more likely to benefit from ‘structural reflexivity in which agency, set free from the constraints of social structure, reflects

on the 'rules' and 'resources' of that structure' (Lash 1994: 115). For Bjerrum Nielsen (2004b: 11): 'The modern competencies of reflexivity, self observation and personal biographical narration have to a large extent been developed historically as modern feminine competencies'. Thus she argues that precisely because subject positions have been less self evident for girls than boys, it is more necessary for them to ask themselves who they are. She saw the State's recognition of equality norms, welfare and child care rights as important contributors to such reflexivity in Scandinavia. These latter elements have not been present in Ireland, although their mother's exposure to the Women's Movement and the fostering of resistance amongst daughters (O'Hara, 1997; O'Connor, 1998a) has arguably encouraged a reflexivity amongst girls.

In looking at young people's narratives, the present study draws on texts written by a national sample of young people in Fifth Grade in First Level (10-12 years) and in Transition Year in Second Level (14-17 years). They were invited as part of the millennium celebrations, to 'tell their life stories', to write a page 'describing themselves and the Ireland that they inhabit' so as 'to provide a national data base' and 'an invaluable archive' that would explain to a 'time traveller' in 2999 what 'they could have expected to see, hear, enjoy and avoid' (Write Now, 1999). It draws initially on a random sample of 4,100 of such texts drawn from the roughly 34,000 texts that were collected. The methods of analysis were quantitative and qualitative and are described in more detail in Chapter 2.

The book is organised around a number of key concepts which are seen as critical in understanding young people's narratives about themselves: individualisation and/or structural embeddedness, doing boy and/or girl as well as global and/or local. These are not seen as binary dichotomies, although for brevity they are sometimes presented in a way that might suggest that (e.g. 'doing boy/girl'). Rather they are best envisaged as discrete continua with no necessary relationship between individuals' positions on both. Thus, for example, it is possible for high levels of 'doing girl' to coexist with high levels of 'doing boy'. A similar situation may exist in the case of global/local. It

is more difficult to imagine this in the case of individualisation and structural embeddedness, although it is certainly possible to imagine high levels of the former coinciding with moderate levels of the latter or vice versa.

## **Summary**

Irish society has been undergoing very rapid change in the past twenty-five years: economically, socially and culturally. Thus since the 1980s it has moved from being a society characterised by economic depression to what has been depicted as the Celtic Tiger. It has been increasingly exposed to cultural globalisation. There has also been an increasing disenchantment with institutional structures, particularly with the institutional Roman Catholic Church. The family remains important- but it is a very different structure to the 1970s, with the majority of young married women now being in paid employment and with family life being increasingly shaped by individualisation and globalisation.

In this chapter we looked first briefly at the nature and extent of such societal and cultural change. We then looked at childhood within this changing social and cultural context. We explored concepts of individualisation and structural embeddedness and the evidence that might be adduced as regards the absence/presence of such phenomena (including the ascriptive/non-ascriptive form of their connectedness; references to internal emotional states as opposed to references to the categorical nature of their identity; attitudes towards time etc). It was recognised that the focus on individualisation with its implicit rejection of categorical identities implicitly raised issues about the nature of a gendered reality-something that has been increasingly reflected in a focus on doing boy/girl.

This focus implies a performative concept of gender, reflected, for example, in a focus on life styles. However despite the rapidly changing nature of the society, what limited evidence we have suggested that young women's constructions of themselves continues to revolve around relationships and caring; while young men's revolve around technology and sport. There were some indications of the adoption by girls of



what purported to be gender neutral patterns, but for the most part these seemed to be traditionally male ones, indeed in some cases they appeared to be related to hyper or hegemonic constructions of masculinity, particularly involving self destructive behaviour as reflected in alcohol consumption. There were also suggestions that binary gender definitions continued to exist as regards the expression of emotion amongst Irish men.

The key site as regards the practise of masculinity still seemed to revolve around sport with Ging's work (2005) highlighting the importance of the media and suggesting that there were no structural supports for non-hegemonic constructions of masculinity: their existence reflecting idiosyncratic factors. Similarly despite the dramatic transformation in the proportion of married women in paid employment in the 1990s, and the largely positive attitudes to such participation, the limited evidence available suggested that the key sites involving ways of doing girl continued to include relatedness, although boundary crossing in terms of life styles (reflected and reinforced by the media) was much more likely to occur in the case of girls than boys.

The structure of the remainder of the book is as follows. Chapter 2 is concerned with the methodology. In Chapter 3, the main focus is on one aspect of the young people's accounts of individualisation/structural embeddedness namely their connectedness, looking for example at their references to ties with friends and family. In Chapter 4, we look at such indicators in the context of discourses about time. In Chapter 5, we look at another aspect of individualisation/structural embeddedness by looking at these young people's references to space. In Chapter 6 we look at other aspects of narratives of the self, focussing on modes of reflexivity, including references to internal emotional states, to authenticity and to critical moments, with references to categorical elements were seen as indicative of social embeddedness. In each of these chapters we look at differences in ways of doing boy and girl. In Chapter 7 we look at doing boy/girl as reflected in accounts of their life styles. Chapter 8 includes an exploration of both doing boy/girl, individualisation/structural embeddedness and global/local focusing not only on their written texts but also on the content of the back

pages which they were invited to use creatively. Chapter 9 draws the book to a close and suggests its main conclusions.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

### Introduction

Stanley (2000: 40) noted that auto/biography is concerned with '*practices*, that is the myriad of everyday and frequently competing social practices concerned with the articulation of (often competing, sometimes discontinuous) notions of 'selves' and 'lives''. There has been a rich tradition of European work in the broad area of auto/biography, which has used a variety of methodologies including focus groups (Brannen et al, 2002) and interviews (Brannen et al, 2004; Helve, 1993). However this study is relatively unusual in so far as it focuses entirely on texts written by children and young people. Furthermore, the accounts produced by these young people are organisationally driven in the sense that they were invited to do them within a school setting and so can be seen as similar to solicited diaries (Bell, 1998) or externally required texts (Stanley, 2000): a frequently used approach in studies of young people (James and Prout, 1990). Given increasing awareness of children politically (Government Publications, 2000) and in the wider sociological context (Cleary et al, 2001; Brannen and O'Brien, 1996) these texts were seen as providing an importance resource.

In this chapter we will first outline the sources of the data used in this study and its main limitations. Then we will outline the quantitative and qualitative method of analysis used in the study. We will illustrate the ways in which the qualitative analysis, although initially driven by concepts underpinning the quantitative analysis (such as relationships) went beyond this. It will be shown how quantitative and qualitative analysis was used to explore the content of the texts and, since the young people had been given the option of using the reverse side of the sheet creatively for drawing, poems, songs or lyrics, how this material was dealt with. Finally we will briefly outline the ways in which key concepts such as individualisation/structural embeddedness; global/local and doing boy/girl were operationalised in the qualitative analysis.

## Sources of the Data

All the children in Ireland in Fifth Grade in First Level, and in Transition Year in Second Level, in 3,658 schools (3044 First Level Schools, 486 Second Level Schools and 128 Special Schools/classes: Kelly, 1999) were invited as part of the millennium celebrations, to ‘tell their life stories’, to write a page ‘describing themselves and the Ireland that they inhabit’ so as ‘to provide a national data base’ and ‘an invaluable archive’. The guidelines sent to teachers suggested that topics include locality and community, family and friends, home, hopes and ambitions for the new millennium, pastimes and hobbies, role models and influences including fun, fashion, music, sport, technology and games (Write Now, 1999).

Half (51 per cent) of the 3,658 schools returned texts: 53 per cent of First Level Schools and 43 per cent of Second Level and 29 per cent of Special Schools (a small number of schools who returned texts were impossible to classify since their names did not match those on the Department of Education lists). The data used in this study drew on a stratified random one in 10 sample of the 33,828 texts, providing a total of 4,100 individual pieces of text. Such stratification was undertaken so as to ensure that small First Level schools, many of which could be expected to have less than ten students in Fifth Class would not be under-represented. The majority (85%) of the texts sampled were produced by children in Fifth Grade in First Level (typically aged 10-12 years). Texts written by girls accounted for roughly half (56%) of all the sample texts. The low proportion of texts returned by Transition Year students is striking. It is difficult to interpret this. However, it may reflect the perception of the exercise as ‘childish’- an interpretation that seems plausible in view of the way in which it was presented to schools (through a video and documentation).

INSERT TABLE 2.1

The young people were told that a random selection of texts would be bound into a Millennium Book that would be presented to the President of Ireland. The remainder of the texts were returned to the schools (the main sample of 4,100 texts having been drawn before they were returned) with the young people being encouraged to produce

local or regional Millennium Books, which would explain to a ‘time traveller’ in 1999 what ‘they could have expected to see, hear, enjoy and avoid’ (Write Now, 1999). The vast majority (92 per cent) of those in this main sample were attending Roman Catholic schools- mirroring the situation at national level (Devine et al, 2004). This trend was strongest at First Level: with 96 per cent of those in the main sample at First Level attending such schools- exactly mirroring the national trends (Devine et al, 2004). At Second level, the pattern was weaker, with 71 per cent of those in Transition Year in Second Level attending Roman Catholic Schools- and girls being more likely than the boys to do this (75 per cent versus 64 per cent respectively).

Over three fifths of those in the main sample were attending co-educational schools. This was consistent with the national pattern where the majority of schools at both first and second level are co-educational. Second Level schools, both in the main sample and nationally were more likely than those at First Level to be single sex. However the sheer proportion of students from single sex schools in the main sample was much higher than in the national figures- with 35 per cent of those at Primary Level and 59 per cent of those at Second Level in the present study being at single sex schools (the national figures are 14 per cent of primary schools, and 36 per cent of Second Level Schools: Devine et al, 2004). It is not clear why this divergence exists.

The schools the young people attended were fairly evenly spread between rural areas, towns, cities and suburbia –with the most common location at both First and Second Level being towns; and with Second Level schools being unlikely to be in rural areas. It was not possible to assess the class position of these young people: 15% of the schools being assessed as disadvantaged on Department of Education criteria. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used and identifying information, local or school referents were not used in the case of individual quotations.

INSERT TABLE 2. 2

The data from this study is limited in several ways. Firstly, it was produced within a classroom situation. This is not an atypical solution to an attempt to centre the focus

on children and their experiences (James and Prout, 1990). In such a context there is a risk of collective planning –and there were suggestions that this occurred amongst some of the younger children. Furthermore, the influence of the school setting or perceived reader on the texts cannot be ascertained although the directions to schools however specifically indicated that no selection was to be made on the basis of quality or appropriateness. Secondly, the contributors were not required to give personal information other than their names and their school year: hence limiting independent variables. Thirdly, it is impossible to know to what extent these texts reflect normative ideas about the appropriateness of particular kinds of identities in childhood and adolescence although it seems possible that they may do so at least to some extent. Furthermore, because the method was entirely based on documents, the young people were not asked why they included/excluded particular elements in their written texts and/or what they saw as the meaning of these texts. Hence, although the data is based on children's texts, the interpretation of these texts is from an adult perspective. Thus it was not possible to explore the meaning of the creative elements on the back page in a context where, for example, drawings of houses by boys seldom identified them as their own (the girls were much more likely to do this –either explicitly by labelling them as My House or implicitly by putting the same number on the door as on their address). It is impossible to know to what extent this reflects girls' identification with the house as 'female space' –although such an explanation would seem to be compatible with Irish women's continued acceptance of disproportionate responsibility for that space and their high valuation of the housewifery role with more than three fifths of the women in the Irish part of the European Values Study agreeing with the statement that 'Being a housewife is 2000 is just as fulfilling as working for pay' (McGinnity et al, 2004; Fahey et al, 2005a).

In Ireland, attendance at school is compulsory up to age 16 years. In fact most remain in the Second Level system until after they have completed the terminal examination (i.e. Leaving Certificate: typically sat around 18 years: Devine et al, 2004). This pattern does vary by gender: 73 per cent of girls and 57 per cent of boys being in fulltime education at age 18 (CSO, 2004). Girls also outperform boys in state

examinations (typically taken at 16 and 18 years: O'Connor, 1998a). Boys educational experiences are also typically less focussed than girls' on personal development, while practices (such as 'streaming') which stigmatise those who are less able academically are more common in boys than in girls' schools (Baker et al, 2004).

One of the continuities in children's experiences of childhood has been the control of their time and space through school attendance, although the extent of such control varies with the age of the child. At First Level, the school year consists of 181 days in the year, with such schools being typically open from 8.50 am –2.30 pm per day. There are eight grades or classes and children typically finish in sixth class at age 12 or 13 years. At Second Level, the school year is shorter, consisting of 167 teaching days; with such schools typically open from 8.50-3.30 pm; and young people completing five/six years (depending on whether Transition Year is done) and finishing at roughly 18 years of age. The longest break is during the summer-typically from early July- September 1<sup>st</sup> for those at first level, and from early June-September 1<sup>st</sup> for those at Second Level (Devine et al, 2004). Thus it is clear that although school times map a sizeable proportion of young people's lives, there are also periods that are completely unstructured. However, other than during holiday times, schoolwork extends into their free time through homework. It takes up over an hour per night for the group (11-12 years) at First Level and just under four hours for those in Leaving Certificate years in Second Level (see Devine et al, 2004). Striking gender differences have emerged in a number of studies as regards time spent at homework (Fahey et al, 2005b; De Roiste and Dinneen, 2005). However Fahey found that the amount of time spent on homework dropped substantially during Transition Year in Second Level (the year between undertaking the Junior Certificate state examination and the Leaving Certificate state examination), with the overwhelming majority of students doing only at most one hour homework during that year.

The ethical issues of conducting research on children have begun to be given the attention they deserve in research years (Denscombe and Aubrook 1992; James et al, 1998; Morrow, 1998). This material came from an initiative aimed at providing an

account of their lives for future generations: a reference to the use of such data for research purposes being included in the material sent to schools. The specific permission of the young people involved was not sought- although its use for research was compatible with the impetus behind the compilation of an informative public document providing an account of their lives for future generations: a reference to the use of such data for research purposes being included in the material sent to schools. Permission to use the data was obtained from the Department of Education who had collected the data.

### **Method of analysis**

The method of analysis was both quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative analysis involved the 4,100 texts in the main sample as well as sub-samples drawn from that main sample were used to provide the broad framework within which a more nuanced understanding of young people and of the processes operating in their lives could be located. The initial qualitative analysis was a thematic one that was undertaken on the basis of a random selection of 600 sheets each by two of the other researchers. Working initially in the context of the categories identified in the quantitative analysis, themes and sub-themes were identified. Since the adolescents' texts constituted only 15 per cent of the total, and hence were under-represented in these samples, a supplementary thematic analysis of a random sample of 220 of such texts was undertaken in order to identify the themes in the adolescents' texts. The qualitative data was also used inductively to identify themes that were in some cases reframed in interaction with the theoretical literature. A focus on global elements was one of those that emerged through this process. In order to further explore such global content, quantitatively and qualitatively, a random sub-sample of the 14-17 year olds (n=96) main texts and back pages was also undertaken. Similarly a sub-sample of n=341 texts written in a school context by those in Fifth Class in First Level (typically aged 10-12 years) was selected to explore the ways in which global and local processes impacted on young people's ways of doing boy/girl; and the ways in which this could be explored through those texts and the relationship between them and



creative elements, such as drawings, on the back page. A more detailed discussion of the methods of analysis is outlined below.

### ***Quantitative Analysis***

A preliminary selection of texts was used as a pilot by one of the other researchers to identify the main themes to be explored and to form the basis of the coding frame and hence the quantitative analysis. On the basis of this, the main themes identified were:

- a) *Family* (references to them; use of first names; type referred to; their importance in their life; loss/breaks)
- b) *Friends* (references to them; their names; best/close friends; number of friends)
- c) *School* (references to teacher; favourite subject; positive/negative references to teacher and to school)
- d) *Descriptions of self* (references to their birth; physical appearance; favourite types of clothing, sport, music, TV programmes, food and role models);
- e) *Hobbies and activities* (including favourite sport played; references to computer gamers/internet; to participation in prestige sports such as golf or horse riding; to playing GAA games; to shopping; to reading, music or other activities)
- f) *Pets* (including whether they are named; their importance)
- g) *Roots and Heritage* (including references to their own town/village/area; to historical monuments; to their daily routine)
- h) *The Future* (including their reference to it; expectations of it; how it is envisaged)
- i) *Current Affairs* (including the kind of references made)

The main independent variables that were identified were school class group (i.e. Fifth Class, First Level; Transition Year Second Level) and gender. The entire subsample of 4,100 texts was coded. A 10% sample of the first 700 texts were double coded by two of the other researchers so as to assess the adequacy of the coding scheme and the reliability of the main coder.

A quantitative analysis was also undertaken of sub-samples of 14-17 year olds (n=96) and 10-12 year olds (n=341) focussing particularly on the global and local content of the texts. This analysis also included the content of back pages of the written texts, focussing initially on its use for drawings/collages and songs/poems, and later on a more nuanced qualitative analysis of its content. As one would expect in the light of other work (such as Punch, 2002; Morrow, 1998) the extent to which the young people used this back page varied by gender and indeed also by age. Thus the 14-17 year olds were roughly twice as likely as the 10-12 year olds to leave the back page blank (both in the main sample and in the sub-samples). Boys were also more likely than the girls in both age groups in the main sample and in the sub-sample to do this. This may well reflect the boys' lower levels of compliance in a school context. This was the only area where the sub-sample of 10-12 year olds deviated somewhat from the main sample. However this seems unlikely to have any crucial consequences.

INSERT TABLE 2. 3

In both the sub-samples, and in the main sample, boys were most likely to use the back page for drawings/collages, girls for lyrics/songs/poems. Across the main 10-12 year old sample, by far the most common use of the back page was drawing. These together with that minority (5%) who used the back page for lists/facts were combined into a category of drawings and related texts, so that just over half of both the overall 10-12 year old sample and the sub-sample (n=341) used the back page for drawings/collages or related texts, with little gender difference (in contrast to Punch's 2002 work). Amongst the 14-17 year olds, 28 per cent of both the main sample and the sub-sample used the back page for drawings/collages or related texts, with again very little difference between the boys and the girls. Under one in five of the back pages amongst both the main 10-12 year old sample and the sub-sample, and roughly one in four of both the main sample and the sub-sample of the 14-17 year olds used the back page consisted of songs/poems. In both cases girls were more likely than the boys to use the back page in this way, possibly reflecting girls' greater linguistic facility (Lynch and Lodge, 2002) and/or their greater interest in pop culture

(O'Connor, 2005). The qualitative analysis of the back pages is discussed in the next section.

### *Qualitative Analysis*

In the qualitative analysis, the main focus was on a thematic qualitative analysis- initially focussing on the themes identified in the quantitative analysis and later on others that emerged inductively from the data in interaction with the literature. Maunther and Doucet's (1998) method, involving a number of readings of the text and focussing on different aspects in each reading contributed to the qualitative analysis. Some of the elements they identified had already been identified in the quantitative analysis. Thus for example, they (1998:131) stressed the importance of listening for relationships with parents, siblings and friends. Their (1998:126) focus on the story being told was helpful in highlighting the importance of structure and reflexivity; their focus on the active 'I' stimulated an exploration of a search for authenticity; while their focus on social context was useful in highlighting both the perceived character of the reader and the nature of the wider social and cultural context.

In the context of their focus on structure, it was striking that at first glance, many of the texts written by the 10-12 year olds told a broadly similar story. Thus frequently the young person gave their name; referred to the composition of their family; identified the things which were important to them; referred to their interests and (in some cases) went on to refer to more general ideas about the future whether at the level of their own personal hopes, or broader macro social concerns. However this homogeneity in structure concealed differences in content- the most obvious of which was variation in terms of gender. Indeed this gender variation was frequently reflected in the general presentation of the text, with the boys' texts being typically more untidy and less satisfactory in terms of spelling and punctuation than the girls'. In many ways the picture some of these texts painted seemed at first glance to differ little from childhoods twenty or thirty years ago, particularly as regards the continued importance of the family and peer relationships. Technological artefacts are of course

a new phenomenon, but were very much absorbed within the parameters of young people's lives. A focus on such global elements was provoked by a reflection on the differences between childhoods across time, in the context of an examination of the literature.

The structure of many of the adolescent texts was more varied, although some were similar in structure and tone to their younger counterparts (i.e. including their name; what was important to them; their interests and life styles). In many of the 14-17 year old texts there was a more immediate sense of individuality and even intimacy as young people wrote about who they were and what mattered most to them. One felt privileged to be party to such reflections: sometimes wryly amused by their depictions of those around them; sometimes impressed by their idealism and very occasionally dismayed by their cynicism or anger. Other texts focussed on one particular aspect of their lives or experiences (such as *My Locality*) and were characterised by irony or other kinds of emotional subtlety. Gender differences in content were a persistent feature. Thus even when the girls' texts revolved around football they referred less to their own successes or failures than to the teams they followed. Overall the dominant picture was of a childhood embedded in the family; with the 14-17 year olds indicating a more individualised sense of themselves, and with gender differences in style and content.

In both the 10-12 and 14-17 year olds texts the most common context for references to what Maunther and Doucet, 1998: 128) call an active 'I' were in terms of these young people's life styles and interests. However their focus on 'what the respondent experiences, feels and speaks about herself'; highlighting 'where the respondent might be emotionally or intellectually struggling to say something' provoked a focus on the extent to which texts written by young people reflect individualised, inward looking patterns identified by theorists of late modernity such as a search for authenticity (a theme that is explored in Chapter 6).

Mauthner and Doucet (1998:132) also stressed the importance of locating accounts within broader social, cultural and structural constraints-focussing particularly on 'how individuals experience the particular social context from which they are speaking'. Brannen et al (2004:6) also argued for the importance of making a link between the biographical and historical context –while recognising 'the current epistemological tensions between the two research traditions of realism and interpretivism' and noting that 'silences' might exist which reflected taken-for-granted hegemonic realities. However although the young people involved in the present study were born between 1982-1985 or 1987- 1989, their family context was likely to vary depending on the stage at which their parents began their parenting career. Thus for example, those mothers whose maternal career began in the 1970s, lived through a time when only a very small minority of married women were in paid employment (O'Connor, 1998a; Devine et al, 2004); when neither Maternity Leave nor divorce existed; and, where, despite the influence of the Women's Movement, Irish society was one in which patriarchal power was still very much a reality. It was a society where hierarchy was accepted, indeed seen as normal; where the dominance of the institutional Roman Catholic Church was very much part of the taken-for-granted fabric of family life; where contraceptives were only made available under doctor's prescription and for bona fide married couples in 1979 (O'Connor, 1998a); the 1980s also being economically difficult years, with very high levels of migration of young people. On the other hand, those born to mothers starting their parental careers in 1989 were more likely to be characterised by mothers' participation in paid employment (CSO, 2004); and with rising economic standards of living in the 1990s, such childhoods were more likely to be characterised by foreign holidays, declining religious observance and acceptance of institutional authority, smaller families and a greater likelihood of being reared in lone parent (roughly one in four children being born in such settings in the early 1990: Devine et al, 2005). In both contexts sizeable proportions of families were characterised by poverty and had other experiences that deviated from the norm.

It is widely recognised that accounts, whether written or verbal, are likely to be influenced by the perceived audience. The young people in this study were asked to

write a page about their lives for posterity. As in the case of an Internet conversation, the persona of the reader was not clear, although the assumed existence of a reader was evident in many of the texts. Later in this chapter it will be suggested that it was possible to identify a series of stances taken by the young people, with varying levels of authority and deference, towards that reader. However at this stage it is worth noting that for some young people they were unimaginable (*'I cannot begin to imagine the world of the reader of this page': Dermot, Transition Year, Second Level*) someone who was implicitly assumed to be very different to *'us primitive 20<sup>th</sup> Century people'* (*Kieran, Transition Year, Second Level*); while in other cases the young people specifically recognised the possibility that the reader could be their own descendant (*'just in case my Great, Great Great Great grandchildren are reading this'*).

Some of the young people (particularly the girls) provided the unknown reader with factual information about their current social, demographic and cultural context. Thus Debbie (*Transition Year, Second Level*) focussed exclusively on a description of her town- its current population, industries and appearance, past history and expected future development. Some presented what they saw as positive national and international developments –in the political, scientific or technological area (such as the Euro; the digital revolution and genetic engineering). Others' accounts included references to violence –sometimes locating this at national level (for example, the Northern Irish conflict), while yet others focused on international events (such as the war in Kosovo- and the perceived ineffectuality of NATO involvement). Others (particularly the boys) interpreted that context for them, adopting a didactic tone as they 'explained' the salient features of their world to a reader who was presumed to be from a different time- arguably reflecting the existing cultural position of male public control over the creation of knowledge. For Ian (*Transition Year, Second Level*) the role of cultural interpreter is interwoven with his own idea of who he is and his concern with truth:

*'I am not going to lie to you. There is a lot of hunger in the world to-day. There are a lot of people trying to help. I would always love to help these people in need. ....I often wonder about the future will there be peace or will there be war. I don't believe in hate or greed. There are people who are racist. I am not.*

*I believe everyone is equal. Both men and women are doing the same jobs. Doing the same things. I can say life through my eyes is different to anybody else's view of life....I am telling you the truth about this'.*

In other texts it was possible to identify an underlying concept of social progress. Thus for example, Derek (Transition Year, Second Level) referred implicitly to this in saying *'Hopefully in your life time you can see Ireland united'; 'by the time someone reads this these problems are some way to being solved'* (Kieran, Transition Year, Second Level). In other cases the reader was seen as a potential source of information about this future world, and the writer positioned himself as a seeker of knowledge about that future world:

*'In my time many people believed that Jesus would come again. Has He? .....IS THE NORTH FREE? (Andy, Transition Year, Second Level).*

This was a less powerful stance-infused by the realisation that such questions might not even be heard: *'If predictions [about global warming] are true then perhaps this will never be read'*. Others revealed their own anger and a claim to moral power by asking:

*'Is this country still a hole full of racists and fascists?. I hope for your sake and for everyone's sake that the scum has been wiped off the streets. That the junkies and the rest of the filth that pollute our streets are gone' (Donal, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Others sought immortality through establishing a link with future generations: *'I am writing this in the hope that it will be read by following generations of students'* (Denis, Transition Year, Second Level). In each of these cases the discourse was one where the crucial element was interpreting the current world in the context of receiving or sending information about a future world.

Sometimes the role adopted was much more that of a confidant- in some cases indeed one who was grateful for the presumed attention of the reader who was directly addressed at the end of the text: *'Well thanks for taking the time to step inside my head' (Deirdre, Transition Year, Second Level)*. Thus, Derek's (Transition Year, Second Level) text exemplifies both the role of cultural informant and grateful speaker by saying that: *'Well I hope I gave you an insight into what teenagers were*

*like around 1999. Thanks for reading*'. In other cases although the concern was still largely with the transmission of information, the tone and content was much more concerned with social acceptability: *'I hope you enjoyed reading this. I'm going now. Lots of love and jelly tots'* (Peggy, Transition Year, Second Level). In other cases, a desire to please was combined with a concern with the adequacy of the information presented. Thus Jim (Transition Year, Second Level) concludes by saying that: *'I hope the person reading this has enjoyed it and I hope that you get a fair idea of what life was like now'*. Others gave advice to the reader adopting an authoritative pseudo parental role: *'Say no to drugs, but drink a lot, forget about peers be yourself and have fun. Life isint that serious'* (Don, Transition Year, Second Level); *'That's my life. So please dont laugh'* (Laura Fifth Class, First Level)

The qualitative analysis also included the creative elements on the back pages of the texts. Over the past 10 years there has been increasing interest in qualitative analyses of visual images in sociology (whether these are drawings or photos: see Prosser 1998; Leonard, 2002). The use of drawings in combination with other data has been widely encouraged (see Morrow, 1998; Leonard, 2002; Punch, 2002; James et al, 1998). Such visual data has been seen as a way of stepping outside a particular verbal culture (Prosser, 1998): providing insights into young people's concepts of health (Wetton and Mc Wirther, 1998); family (O'Brien et al, 1996); examinations (Leonard, 2003) and self image (Wakefield and Underwager, 1998). It has been argued that the difficulties posed by such material is not necessarily much greater than that posed by verbal data (Prosser, 1998; Becker, 1998). However such an approach potentially provides deeper insights than that derived from one method alone.

The most commonly occurring drawing amongst the boys involved football at some level. Other more occasional images featured technological artefacts or TV images, (unidentified) houses, local beauty spots/historical buildings and occasionally national symbols such as flags or the shamrock. There was greater variety in the girls'



drawings. They included images drawn from TV or pop culture, occasional ones involving football and technology as well as drawings of (identified) houses, globes, and far more drawings related to nature, animals and images of their families and friends. Drawings related in a general way to nature (such as drawings of a sunrise; a kite over the sea), animals (including but not restricted to their own pets) as well as drawings of specific friends and family were more likely to be done by girls than boys. The salience of attachment figures in the girls' drawings were striking and is compatible with girl's greater relational connectedness- a pattern that will be described in Chapter 3.

Overall then, the qualitative analysis was concerned with the elaboration of themes used in the quantitative analysis. Other themes emerged inductively from the data and in interaction with the literature. Maunther and Doucet's approach to readings was also helpful in, for example, provoking a focus on the structures of the texts; on the importance of the wider social context and on their stance towards the reader- the latter being related to variation in ways of doing boy/girl in these accounts. However, the main foci in the qualitative analysis reflected the indicators of the key concepts which are outlined below: viz. the indicators of global/local, doing boy/girl and individualisation/structural embeddedness.

### ***Indicators of Global and Local***

Young people are avid consumers of what Watson (2004:132) called 'transnational culture in all of its most obvious manifestations: music, fashion, television and cuisine'. In looking at indicators of the global, this was one of the main foci. In addition however indicators were also included of the extent to which their texts suggested that in Albrow's (2004:139) terms their consciousness 'exhibited the traces of world events' and/or their own imaginative involvement in a global context as reflected in references to international travel or their hopes as regards living abroad or undertaking what Rygaard (2003) called exotic occupations which would inevitably

mean that they would have to leave the local area. Four types of such global elements were identified: firstly, those referring to a global entertainment or consumer culture, including references to international soccer, pop stars, chart song lyrics or designer labels; secondly, references to global technology, including TV programmes, the internet, mobile phones, computers and computer games, play stations; thirdly, references to global political concerns, including world peace, war, global warming; and fourthly, references to international travel, dreams or hopes as regards travelling or working abroad. Those aspects of their life style that were not seen as global included those related to references to family, friends, school, local area and locally played sports.

As previously mentioned, as a small society of just over four million people, Ireland's size alone is conducive to the existence of a very strong local orientation. Traditionally this has been reflected in and reinforced by locality based sporting organisations and competitions (particularly involving Gaelic football), and by the institutional Roman Catholic parish system of worship and community based activities, although (as suggested in Chapter 1) both of these seem likely to be increasingly under pressure. Furthermore, the linking of nationalist symbols such as the Irish flag with the activities of the IRA in the North of Ireland over the past thirty years has created a substantial degree of anxiety surrounding the use of such symbols by children in Ireland. Furthermore, Albrow (2004) noted that those within the same local area might have a very different sense of that context depending on the extent to which their consciousness and/or their experiences reflected global elements.

However in a society that is undergoing rapid social change, it seems important to recognise that for some, the locality based parameters of their experiences may continue to be important. In looking at local indicators, we were particularly concerned with those that indicated a sense of place- broadly defined to include an awareness of some kind of a national or sub-national spatial entity (ranging in size from their room, to their home, village/town, region or nation) as well as explicitly geographically related elements of their life style (such as playing football for a local

club). Four types of such local elements were identified. Firstly, those referring directly to the significance and meaning of their local area including references to its history, geographical structure, perceived beauty, tourist potential, local amenities and local heroes; secondly, references to their own room, house or wider geographical area which suggested its meaning or significance (including an identification with or pride in 'my parish'; 'my community'); thirdly, references to the wider area of the state, including references to Ireland, pride in being Irish, references to the national flag or to national political leaders or other national figures; fourthly references to aspects of their current or aspirational life style which suggested a local or national identification and/or activities linked to a specific geographical location. References to activities with family or friends as such were typically not included. Equally references to spatial aspect of school were not included since as the texts were written there, it was impossible to assess the emotional significance of this area.

### ***Indicators of Individualisation and Structural Embeddedness***

As outlined in Chapter 1, Beck (1992) and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) suggested that individualisation involved 'disembedding' and what they called disenchantment or a loss of traditional feelings of security, whether at an individual or global level. Leccardi (2005) suggested that for young people individualisation was characterised by feelings of uncertainty surrounding the future; an unwillingness to make plans; a resorting to chance; a focus on the extended present, as they were unable to project themselves into the future by means of decisions made in the present and lacked the milestones that had been used to map the transitions from youth to adulthood. She referred to young people as 'nomads of the present' who 'do not pursue an end: they explore, enveloped in impermanence' (ibid: 140). Brannen and Nilsen (2002) identified three kinds of ideal types including those that had extended time orientations. Associated with such attitudes towards time were feelings of ontological insecurity or anxiety in a context where young people perceive themselves as lacking the markers that were seen as charting a path between youth and adulthood. Thus a pre-occupation with internal emotional states and reflexivity can also be seen as

reflecting individualisation as well as uncertainty regarding the future; an absence of plans or ambitions as well as a focus on extended present.

As noted in Chapter 1, individualisation can also be reflected in a focus on the ties that are chosen rather than ascribed- with friendships being such relationships par excellence (O'Connor, 2002/1992). Close/best friends can be seen as the most obvious reflection of such ties, including as they do not only those which are self chosen but also those which have emotional primacy and/or intimacy. Embeddedness can be seen as reflecting the ongoing prioritisation of the group over the individual and in particular as reflecting a focus on ascribed connectedness (reflected in references to the birth family or to the extended family); to predictable biographical time that locates the individual in a generational, cohort or life course context. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) see disembedding as involving a weakening of the nation state of class affiliation and of the traditional family – with fixed social categories based on such affiliations being described as ‘zombie categories’ that have died yet still live on’. (ibid: 27). Hence, references to positional aspects of identity, denoting membership of groups or categories – such as race, ethnicity, gender or nation can be seen as reflecting structural embeddedness. However in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s work there is ambiguity about the extent to which gender is/is not such a zombie category.

### ***Indicators of Doing Boy/Girl***

Connell (2005:13) suggested that ‘One of the most important circumstances of young people’s lives is the gender order they live in.’ Thus, for example, boys create their lives individually and collectively through what he calls ‘the configurations of practice associated with the social position of men’ within a particular social and cultural context. Implicit in Connell’s argument is a rejection of biological essentialism whether rooted in a focus on bodily differences or bodily stages of development: ‘The physical changes matter but they do not directly determine the

experience of adolescence' (Connell, 2005: 14). Implicit in this is the idea that identity in general, and gendered identity in particular is less an essence than a performance. More specifically, it has been argued that through 'talk' we are constructed/construct ourselves as gendered beings (Cameron, 1998). 'The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts' (Butler, 1990). Thus although we may spend very little time thinking about gender and may not see our identity as a man/woman as an important social element in our identity, nevertheless the discourses created through 'talk' reflect –sometimes competing– views of what it is to be a man/woman in contemporary society.

Within this context, a focus on social practices and sites is a key element. As outlined in Chapter 1, sport– particularly organised competitive team sport (particularly football) being seen as almost as important as sexuality as 'a site of masculinity formation'. Other sites for the construction of gender included consumption, cross gender relationships, fatherhood, breadwinner status and gender segregated employment settings. However, Haywood et al (2005) suggested that there was no necessary relationship between boys and men's constructions of masculinity. Ging (2005:47/48) found that for Irish adolescent boys the mass media effectively functioning as 'a manual of masculinity'. She also found that stereotypical representations of masculinity were most evident in 15-17 year olds' depiction of films and of computer games: violence, fighting, action and sex being key ingredients in those depicted as male with romance, dancing, singing, designing things and creating families being key ingredients in those depicted as female. Although the young men she studied were critical of the pressures on boys to 'suppress emotion and act hard', they got a good deal of pleasure from what she called 'the performance of tough blokeish masculinity' (Ging, 2005:41) with Cleary (2005:157) noting that hegemonic masculinity was seen as necessitating the absence of emotional expression and the denial of vulnerability. However, 'Real life expressions of aggressiveness and

toughness' in school were not associated with status or popularity amongst most boys and girls' (see also Lodge, 2005). Furthermore, the particular kinds of interests and activities which could demonstrate boyiness could also be used by girls: 'Fascination with cartoons, computer games and board games that contained a high content of violence, aggression and toughness... carried with it a 'benign boyiness' that was inclusive of girls and other boys' (Haywood et al, 2005: 205).

Beck (1992) suggested that young women were likely to have expectations as regards gender equality- both as regards sharing domestic work and as regards their occupational lives-with men being likely to simply practice a 'rhetoric of equality'. However, whether societies purported to endorse gender equality or complementarity a positive valuation of womanhood did not exist nor a positive male role vis a vis women (Bjerrum Nielsen, 2004). Jagger (2002: 50/51) suggested that amongst the majority of the women she studied 'physical attractiveness and nurturing remain the key pivots' with Irish women's constructions of the self being located within an overall context of gender roles that stress service, self -sacrifice and subordination (O'Dowd, 1987; O'Connor, 1998a). Furthermore, despite women's rapidly increasing levels of participation in paid employment in Ireland, cultural value is still seen as attaching to women's activities in the domestic arena, with roughly three fifths of both men and women agreeing that: *'Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay'* (Fahey et al, 2005a). The accounts of young people aged 18-30 years (O'Connor, et al, 2002a) suggest that these trends reflect a recognition that women's authority is most likely to exist in the domestic area; with gendered patterns of housework and child care being seen as reflecting women's greater competence and responsibility. Similarly, Lodge and Flynn (2001: 190) noted that in their study of young students (typically aged 10-13 years) many tended to define themselves 'in ways which reflected traditional gendered expectations of behaviour, attitudes and characteristics'. However, a small number of young people, mostly girls, operated as 'boundary crossers' although this tended to reinforce the higher status of male activities. There

was also been a suggestion (Lodge, 2004: 177) that exposure to global influences, such as the television programme *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, provided girls with ‘an opportunity to explore different aspects of their gender identity, and push out the boundaries of what it means to be female’ - since Buffy presented them with an image of femininity which was both powerful and which could be combined with a more traditional romantic discourse. Thus implicit in this work is the idea that although global elements may sometimes be used to reinforce stereotypical ways of doing girl, they may also be used to expand such boundaries.

In the present study the accounts of practices that were seen as indicators of doing boy included: firstly a limited number of best/close friends; secondly references to playing or watching competitive sports; thirdly references to male gendered consumer goods such as computer games or other technologically related activities; and references to breadwinner, fatherhood or to stereotypical male occupations. The accounts of practices that were seen as indicative of doing girl included firstly references to attachments to family and friends- including best friends/close friends; secondly references to watching TV programmes and films involving fashion and romance; thirdly references to motherhood or other stereotypical female vocational activities. However it was recognised that young people’s accounts could include references to what Thorne (1993) and Lodge (2004) called ‘boundary crossing’. Thus for example, the girls’ texts could include references to competitive team sports; and boys to fashion and ‘girlie’ movies/TV programmes.

## **Summary**

In this chapter we looked at the sources of data and the methodology used in this study. The data was derived from a stratified sample of texts written by young people in Fifth Class in First Level and Transition Year in Second Level in a school context when they were invited to write a page ‘describing themselves and the Ireland they inhabit’ ‘to provide a national data base’ ‘an invaluable archive’. It consisted of

4,100 pages of text -with the back pages being used by some young people creatively for drawings, poems, songs and lyrics. The method of analysis of this data was both quantitative and qualitative. At a quantitative level, the 4,100 sheets were coded on a range of variables including family, friends, school, descriptions of self, hobbies and activities, roots, the future and current affairs. In addition, a quantitative analysis was undertaken of sub-samples of the texts of those in Fifth Class in First Level (10-12 year olds) and Transition Year in Second Level (14-17 year olds) and of their back pages.

The qualitative analysis focussed on a thematic analysis, initially in terms of the concepts identified in the quantitative analysis and extended to include themes identified inductively or in terms of the literature. Mauthner and Doucet's form of analysis, although insufficiently nuanced was useful in highlighting issues related to structure of the texts, the audience, and the wider social and cultural context. In this chapter we have also been concerned with identifying the indicators of the key concepts that underpin the subsequent chapters, particularly relating to global/local, doing boy/girl and individualisation/embeddedness. It will be shown that, within the limitations of the data, there are difficulties disentangling a gender script involving doing boy/girl from one characterised by individualisation; and that there are also difficulties disentangling ways of doing boy/girl from structural embeddedness. In this context the concept of relational individualism is useful- implying as it does 'an ability to combine new individualism with relational and responsible attitudes' (Bjerrum Nielsen, 2004: 23). Bjerrum Nilsen also found that such attitudes were more common amongst girls than boys in Scandinavia leading her to conclude that 'there are other kinds of and routes to individualisation than the ones first taken by men in the 19<sup>th</sup> century' (Bjerrum Nielsen, 2004: 25). The underlying concern is with issues related to global/local and doing boy/girl in the book, although the book is organised around a series of themes that have face validity as we look at the content of young people's accounts on their lives.



**Table 2.1: Profile of Respondents in terms of School Grade and Gender**

School Grade		Gender			
Fifth Grade, First Level	84%	Girls	55%	Boys	45%
Transition Year, Second Level	15%	Girls	62%	Boys	38%
Special Class or School	1%	Girls	49%	Boys	51%

**Table 2.2: Profile of Schools**

School Denominational Affiliation		School Gender Intake	
Roman Catholic	92%	Single Sex Girls	25%
Protestant	4%	Single Sex Boys	14%
Jewish	0.1%	Co-educational	61%
Muslim	0.1%		
Multi-denominational	4%		
School Location		School Status	
Rural	23%	Disadvantaged	15%
Town	41%	Non-Disadvantaged	86%
City	16%		
Suburban City	20%		

**Table 2.3: Content of Back Page by Gender in Main Sample and Sub-sample (n=341) in Fifth Class, First Level and Transition Year, Second Level ( n=96)**

<i>a/Main Sample 10-12 yrs</i>	Drawing/Collages & Related Texts	Poems/Songs	Blank	Total N
Boys	58%	12%	30%	100% (1551)
Girls	53%	22%	24%	99% (1872)
Total N	55% (1902)	18% (602)	27%(919)	100% (3423)
<i>b) Sub-Sample (n=341)10-12</i>				
Boys	57% (91)	13% (21)	30% (47)	100% (159)
Girls	56%(102)	27% (48)	18% (32)	101% (182)
Total N	51% (193)	20% (69)	23% (79)	99% (341)
<i>c/Main sample 14-17 yrs</i>				
Boys	30% (67)	13% (30)	57%(130)	100% (227)
Girls	28% (102)	28% (106)	44% (165)	100% (373)
Total	28% (169)	23% (136)	49% (295)	100%(600)
<i>B/Sub-Sample 14-17 yrs</i>				
Boys	30% (12)	13%(5)	58% (23)	101% (40)
Girls	27% (15)	32%(18)	41% (23)	100% (56)
Total	28% (27)	24%(23)	48% (46)	100% (96)

## **Chapter 3: Love and Work**

### **Introduction**

In Chapter 1 it was suggested that individualisation involved ‘disembedding’ or ‘liberation from traditional contexts of dominance and support’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The family is a key source of such embedding in childhood. Hence positive references to it are seen as reflecting structural embeddedness. On the other hand friendships, characterised by individual choice, have been seen as uniquely suited to post or late modern societies characterised by high levels of disembedding of structural relationships (Giddens, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Pahl, 2000). Hence references to such friendships are seen as reflective of individualisation—with the ‘individual becoming the unit for the reproduction of the social in his or her own life world’ (Beck, 2002: 203).

Young people’s lives are not however simply defined by love, but also include work. Children’s attendance at school can be seen as work insofar as children are obliged to devote a large proportion of their time to schoolwork, which contributes substantially to the future economic well being of society (Qvortrup, 2001). Such participation can be seen as an acceptable form of structural embeddedness. On the other hand in voluntarily undertaken wage work can be seen as reflecting children’s individual agency (Leonard, 2005) while also financing their lifestyle, providing them with sociable relationships and improving their ability to handle money (see for example, Mc Coy and Smyth, 2004; Hansen et al, 2001; Morgan, 2000). Hence references to it were seen as indicative of individualisation.

Simmel (1971:235) rather wryly noted that relatively little attention had been paid by sociologists to love relationships, suggesting that this reflected the predispositions of those involved in academic work. This has changed somewhat in that much attention has been paid to the exchange value of relationships as social capital (Coleman, 1988;

Putnam, 2000; Bourdieu, 1999). However, even in studies of adults' family and friendship ties, attention has mainly focussed on the way in which relationships have facilitated the attainment of developmental tasks; have provided access to various kinds of capital and/or have provided crisis support in particular situations (see Pahl, 2000; Morgan, 1996; Becker et al, 2001; O'Connor, 2002/1992). Thus Brooks (2002) noted that such studies tended to be characterised by functionalist thinking. As noted by Leonard (2005) such work has tended to ignore children. Indeed in the case of children, the low level of their exchange value may she suggests reflect their poor power position. Thus, with a small number of notable exceptions (such as Brannen et al, 2001) children's relationships with family members have attracted relatively little attention, although some attention has been paid to their friendships (Griffin, 1985; Hey, 1997; Blatchford, 1998; Pahl, 2000; Brooks, 2002; Devine 2003).

In this chapter our focus is on these young people's texts as narratives. In this context we look at age and gender variation in the existence and nature of relational discourses (Gilligan 1995; Phoenix, 1997) and particularly at variation in relationships with family and friends (Brannen et al, 2001) as depicted in these narratives. It is important to recognise that these texts may not constitute descriptions of these young people's lives but rather may ultimately reflect normative ideas about the appropriateness of particular kinds of connectedness in boys and girls childhood and adolescence. As such they provide insights into age-based concepts of relatedness as well as those related to masculinity and femininity (Connell, 1995 a and b).

### **Embeddedness : References to Family Ties**

Family in Western society is a highly institutionalised area for children's social ties. All of the young people referred to some kind of family setting. Family was a very frequently mentioned element in the texts, particularly in the case of the 10-12 year olds. Thus, 82% of the texts made some reference to family (87% of the 10-12 year olds as compared with 56% of the 14-17 year olds). There was little gender difference in such references amongst the 10-12 year old children (91% of the girls versus 84%

of the boys mentioning family). However, the 14-17 year old girls were considerably more likely than their male counterparts to refer to family (64% versus 42%) possibly reflecting a less relational discourse amongst the boys. INSERT TABLE 3.1

Descriptions by girls of behaviour that could be seen as indicating the importance of family were generally more developed than in the case of the boys. Thus the girls referred to their family being there for them or to the more tangible provision of clothes, food, education, and care when sick. In contrast, boys tended not to explain why family was important to them, but simply saw this as self-evident:

*'My family is important to me because when I am sad they make me feel happy'* (Gloria, Fifth Class, First Level)

*'My family are very important to me. They will always be there for me. They will provide food and clothes for me and see I get a good education'* (Louise, Fifth Class, First Level)

*'My family.... are very important'* (Mike, Fifth Class, First Level).

*'My family.... are important to me. I just don't know what I would do without them'* (Derek, Fifth Class, First Level)

It is possible that such differences reflect girls' greater linguistic ability, their awareness of emotions in general, or of the emotional labour involved in family life in particular (Lynch, 1989a; Lynch and McLoughlin, 1995). Alternatively, girls' greater references to care may also reflect a lower sense of entitlement to such care (Lewis, et al, 2002) or greater awareness of the cost of such care (in terms of time or opportunities foregone). There was some evidence in support of the latter insofar as the girls who mentioned that they had a loving family referred to being 'lucky':

*'I have realised how lucky I am to have a loving family who will care for me and love me'* (Diana, Fifth Class, First Level).

In some cases such relationships were explicitly juxtaposed with what were seen as the more transient, merely enjoyable aspects of their life styles (such as sports or alcohol):

*'The things that are important in my life now are my family and friends. These will for me, never change.'* (Dolores, Transition Year, Second Level)

However, it was striking that although references to the family loving them occasionally occurred ( *'What's important to me is that my parents love me'*: Sarah, Fifth Class, First Level), the word 'love' was rarely used to refer to their feelings about their family. In contrast it will be shown in Chapter 7 that both boys and girls

used it very frequently to refer to their own feelings about aspects of their life style (e.g. *'I love football'*).

Views as to what constitutes a family have been shown to vary. Thus Nixon et al (2006:85) found that in their study of Irish young people aged 9-16 years old, the majority accepted 'a variety of family forms' and 'conceptualised 'family' in an inclusive and flexible way', focussing on 'roles and relationships rather than structures'. Similar trends have emerged in other studies with references not only to nuclear family (i.e. parents and/or siblings) but to a wider range of relatives and even animals (Brannen et al 2001; Levin, 1996; O'Brien et al, 1996; Corcoran, 2007). Within a society where the family is seen very much as the nuclear family, a surprisingly large minority- a quarter- of the 10-12 year olds referred to members of their extended family (particularly grandparents, but also aunts, uncles, cousins etc):

*'I have quite a big family my Granny had 14 children which leaves me with a lot of Aunts and Uncles' (Jennifer, Fifth Class, First Level)*

They referred to staying overnight with grandparents; being fed by a grandmother after school; helping out with farming chores; spending Sundays with them; getting pocket money from them and seeing them as sources of care and fun. Similar references were made in Corcoran's (2007:11) study: 'Aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, etc formed part of an extensive kinship network that had everyday significance in the lives of the children'. In the present study, both boys and girls referred to themselves as 'lucky' because they had not experienced a grandparents' death. Thus as in Brannen et al's study (2004) it appeared that in these texts grandparents, and particularly grandmothers were a source of symbolic and practical support and provided a sense of what they referred to as 'genetic security'. Amongst those who did refer to such other relatives, the tone was strikingly positive, with cross gender identification also occurring in this context:

*'I'd like to be like my grandfather.....loving, caring, happy, kind, understanding, hard worker and always willing to lend a hand to anyone' (Nicola, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'Someone very special to me is my nana. I love the way in the morning, we would go down -and have a chat. She would and will talk about how life was long ago' (Jennifer, Fifth Class, First Level)*

The 10-12 year olds were more likely than the older ones to refer to both nuclear (58 per cent versus 38 per cent respectively) and to extended family (25 per cent versus 10 per cent respectively). Such trends were broadly similar to those emerging in other studies (O'Brien et al, 1996; Levin, 1996). There was little gender difference amongst the 10-12 year olds as regards such references. However, the 14-17 year old girls were more likely than boys of the same age to refer to both the nuclear (42 per cent versus 32 per cent) and extended family (13 per cent versus 5 per cent).

INSERT TABLE 3.2

Hanafin et al (2007) noted that in the Health Behaviour in School Aged Children (HBSC) survey, the majority of young people aged 10-17 years said that they found it easy to talk to their mother when something was really bothering them- and this pattern was affected by age and gender. Thus the 15-17 year old boys were least likely to say this and the 10-11 year old girls most likely to say this (69 per cent versus 88 per cent: *ibid*: 46). The proportion who found it easy to talk to their father in a similar situation was lower and was also affected by age and gender. However it was the 10-11 year old boys who were most likely to say that they found it easy to talk to him in these situations and the 15-17 year old girls who were least likely to say this (80 per cent versus 44 per cent: *ibid*: 49)- suggesting the existence of same sex gender differentiated patterns as regards confiding in the family. Nevertheless, amongst the 15 year olds, girls were more likely than boys to say that parents spent time just talking to them several times a week (70 per cent versus 53 per cent: *ibid*: 52). These latter patterns may reflect the greater physical and/or emotional availability of mothers rather than fathers. In any case they suggest that the 15 year old boys are most likely to be in a relationally isolated position within the family.

In the present study it was striking that despite the traditional strength of the image of the Irish mother, and her perceived emotional importance in the family (see O'Connor, 1998a) these young people for the most part did not differentiate between their mother and father in their texts. These trends contrast with those emerging in Mayall's (2002) studies of children aged 5-13 years in socially and ethnically mixed

areas in the UK. Kiely (2001:5) has argued that in Western the role of the father has ceased to be clear cut- with 'a blurring between the gender-neutral role of parent and the gender specific role of father'. However, in Brannen et al's study (2001: 97) although the 11-14 year olds 'were clearly anxious to be 'fair' to each parent' and emphasised their similar potential as parents, they recognised that in practise they played different roles. Thus the mothers' were described as giving them support, and being someone who understood and cheered them up; fathers being a link to the outside world: taking them to football; or doing things with them that exemplified his special abilities. In Irish society there is a good deal of cultural anxiety surrounding men's decline in authority and status in the family consequent on wider social changes (Clare, 2000; Rattansi and Phoenix, 1997). The desire to protect the father by stressing his potential as a parent, rather than focusing on his actual performance, may be at least part of the explanation for the difference between the present study and Mayall's study. Such protective attitudes have also been reflected in wives exaggeration of their husband's performance of domestic work (see O'Connor, 1998a).

In the present study, on the rare occasions when these young people did differentiate between parents, broadly similar sorts of trends emerged to those in Brannen et al's study: *'My Mom helps me when I am sick. My father talks to me when I want to know some things'* (Alan, Fifth Grade, First Level). The mother's importance as a listener emerged almost in asides: *'A school tour is somewhere you go with your class on a day out and come back and tell your mam all about it'*. (Kerri, Fifth Grade, First Level). References to their mothers where they occurred tended to be warm-and referred to her personal qualities and her role as a mother:

*'I would like to be my mam. She is funny. She is good to talk with.'* (Nicola, Fifth Grade, First Level)

*'She's a really great mother. She's the best mother that ever walked on the earth – well that's what we all say about our mother'* (John, Fifth Grade, First Level)

The young people mostly referred to their father in terms of his occupation (as a builder; teacher, pharmacist etc). They also wrote of doing things with him-surfing the

net, playing computer games, going fishing, helping him with various farm tasks. Very occasionally there were warm references to his personal qualities and to their relationship with him (see Chapter 6 re references to him as a role model within the public arena):

*'I don't want to sound soppy but I think he is the best' (Ian, Fifth Grade, First Level)*

In Frosh et al's (2002) study of 11-14 year old boys, complaints about the fathers' 'emotional unavailability' were very common revealing what they saw as 'an incapacity to listen or to hold on to and manage distress.' In this study, possibly because of emotional protectiveness (or because of the status of the texts as potentially public documents) there were very few negative statements about fathers. There were occasional rather terse references to non-resident fathers (for a nuanced discussion of the issue of non-residency from the father's perspective see Corcoran, 2005):

*'When I was four my Dad moved out, now I do not really remember him so it doesn't bother me' (John, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'He (Dad) doesn't live with me he lives in .....with his other wife.' (Anna, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Irish society has been undergoing very rapid change, with a variety of authoritative institutional structures being weakened by a series of scandals over the past ten years (O'Connor, 1998a and 1995b). In this context, it was interesting to note that, in contrast to, for example, Mayall's (2002) study, there were few references to power – either direct or indirect in the family setting, other than between siblings. Typically the majority of the young people referred initially to 'family', rather than 'parents', 'Mam and Dad' etc. In this way they avoided the generational positioning that is implicit in the very concept of parent (and so hence the concept of themselves as subordinate). Furthermore, the structural positioning of parents and children in terms of authority was also only occasionally reflected in a perception of childhood as a time of apprenticeship:

*'My parents help me to learn manners and what's right and wrong'. (Marian, Fifth Level, First Class)*

This was a much stronger theme in Mayall's (2001) study- something which may reflect the very different ethnic backgrounds of the children in that study. In the



present study, references to the issue of parental control, insofar as they occurred at all were typically indirect:

*'They [Parents] are great and let me buy all the latest fashions which include hipsters, combats, dungarees and tracksuits' (Ann, Fifth Class, First Level).*

References to limits were more common amongst the 14-17 year olds. However the basis for the exercise of those limits did not suggest an acceptance of authority- with the mother being presented as lacking an appreciation of fun –a trend that emerged as in other studies (see Frosh et al, 2002):

*'There's a brilliant teenage disco 1 hours bus drive away. I went twice. I am currently very annoyed with my mother because she says I can't go again. Ever. She thinks it is unsupervised and that there is drink and drugs there. I keep trying to tell her that if I wanted drink or drugs I wouldn't be going all the way there and spending up to £15. She sometimes fails to understand the concept of "FUN". (Claire, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Despite the fact that it has been long been recognised that sibling relationships have similarities with friendships, although they are more likely than them to provide practical help (Wellman, 1990; O'Connor, 1990 and 1998a) relatively little attention has such relationships in childhood. In this study, sibling relationships were, as in other studies (Brannen et al, 2001; O'Connor, 2002/1992; Allan, 1989) sometimes characterised by ambivalence: *' I have one sister. I walsy fight with her but if anything happened to her I would be devastated' (Eoin, Fifth Grade, First Level).* However, there were also references to supportive, caring relationships, which were pseudo-parental in character, with both sisters and brothers providing that care:

*'My brothers are very good to me when my mam and dad are gone out. They help me in my homework or if I am hungry they will give me money to go to the shop or they will cook something for me' (Lorraine, Fifth Grade, First Level)*

*' my brother... is always ready to give me advice for whatever problems I have' (Peter, Transition Year, Second Level).*

Intriguingly, by far the most overt references to power were in the context of sibling power hierarchies based on age and birth order - particularly amongst boys with older sisters: such power lacking any perceived legitimacy in their eyes:

*'Rita is two years older than me and when she bosses me about I tell her to 'get stuffed' (Paul, Fifth Grade, First Level)*

*'I am an eleven year old boy.....I am the smallest in my family and my two big sisters push me around a lot'. (Luke, Fifth Grade, First Level)*

Indeed the proportion of 10-12 year olds who referred to pets was slightly higher than the proportion referring to extended family (30 per cent versus 23 per cent respectively). However only a tiny minority of even the 10-12 year olds in this study broadened the concept of family to include such pets (see Frosh et al, 2002; Levin, 1996):

*'I'm an only child but I have a dog that I call my sister her name is Carol she is three years old' (Steve, Fifth Grade, First Level).*

*'My family consists of two adults three children (including me) a dog and three fish' (Lorna, Fifth Class, First Level).*

In any case, within both age groups, girls were more likely than the boys to refer to pets and to name them-thus reinforcing the picture of the greater salience of relationships in their texts. INSERT TABLE 3.3

Overall then, the majority of these young people referred to family in their texts, although the 10-12 year olds were more likely than the 14-17 year olds to do this. The absence of clear differentiations between parents, and the scarcity of references to their own feelings of love at a relational level in these texts was striking. References, particularly by the 10-12 year olds to other kinds of structural embeddedness, such as references to extended kin and to pets were also striking. Finally there was evidence to suggest that although 10-12 year old boys and girls differed little, family both in the sense of nuclear and extended was much more likely to be referred to by the 14-17 year old girls than boys. Such differential patterns persist when we look at references to friendships.

### **Individualisation: References to Friendship ties**

In Western Society, we have become accustomed to see friendship as a personal attachment that meets human needs for companionship or intimacy. However this kind of perspective ignores the fact that it is a relationship that is socially constructed and culturally valued (O'Connor, 2002/1992). It is not clear how important such relationships are amongst adults in Irish society. Thus for example, Corcoran (2007) found that across the four area case studies, kin or neighbours remained the predominant element-although friendships figured in second place in three of these areas. Friendships can be seen as similar to Giddens (1992:58) 'pure relationships' in

so far as they are entered into for 'what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with the other; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it'. Although in a sense this is the essence of friendship, it will be shown that in some cases these young people's friendship ties had acquired almost fictive kin characteristics so that they were less fragile than this depiction suggests. Such patterns were not peculiar to these young people (O'Connor, 2002/1992). Indeed the fusion of kin and friendship ties was even more apparent in Hannan's (1972:176) study of rural Irish families where he noted that the: 'concept of friend as a freely chosen confidante and intimate to whom one is joined in mutual benevolence' was at that time still used by older people to refer to kin.

In traditional accounts of children's socialisation, friendships are seen as the site of deviant peer sub-cultures, although the absence of friendship ties has also been seen as problematic (James et al, 1998). This societal ambivalence about friendship ties is also reflected in the limited time and space available for young people's friendships (Lynch 1989a). Indeed Smith-Rosenberg (1975:27) suggested that in twentieth century Western society: 'a number of cultural taboos evolved to cut short the homosocial ties of girlhood and to impel the emerging women of thirteen or fourteen towards heterosexual relationships'. Griffin noted that this process was more marked amongst young white girls than amongst African and Afro-Caribbean girls in her English working class study. She suggested that this was partly because the latter were under less pressure to get a boyfriend, and partly because their cultural backgrounds offered them stronger models of female friendship. It is not clear to what extent such patterns have changed- not least because of the increasing marital breakdown and the wider context of challenges to the legitimacy of patriarchal control. In any case Jarvis and Burr (2005) suggested that in television programmes such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, such friendships were implicitly presented as effectively constituting alternative families-such structures being characterised by the absence of hierarchy and of legal or physical compulsion, while allowing those involved freedom of choice as regards their responsibilities and commitment.

With a small number of notable exceptions there has been very little Irish research on friendship. Thus Hennessy and Hogan (2000) noted that although publications by Irish psychologists on 'social functioning' had remained at a high level over the previous twenty five years, much of this work had focussed on the impact of the Northern Ireland conflict on children's lives. The HBSC survey does provide information on the number of friends of the same gender identified by young people – although as Hanafin et al (2007) noted, there is no information about the quality or characteristics of these relationships; and such reports may reflect a social desirability bias. This seems possible since 85 per cent of these young people identified three or more same sex friendships, with very little variation by age or gender. Devine's work (2003) involving children aged seven to thirteen years, differentiated between best/true friends and other friends: this distinction being made in terms of trust, loyalty and support. In US research (mainly on college students) female friendships are typically depicted as 'face to face' (i.e. characterised by high levels of intimate confiding) whereas relationships between young men are depicted as 'side by side' (i.e. characterised by high levels of shared interests and non-verbal activity: see O'Connor, 2002/1992 and 1998b). Frosh et al (2002: 13) suggested that amongst their 11-14 year old boys, friendships were typically with other boys with whom 'they could not talk freely about their emotions for fear of ridicule, but also, paradoxically, as people with whom they could have a laugh and feel free'. In Griffin's (1985) classic work on working class British adolescent girls' relationships with best friends were intimate and long lasting. Furthermore, Griffin like Devine (2003) also found that these friendships were embedded in a loose network of other friendships. Blatchford's (1998) work also suggested that the existence of such networks of female friends occurred amongst the 8-9 year olds in his study. For the most part however, these latter kinds of friendships between girls have tended to be ignored- arguably reflecting the tendency to define femininity in terms of the ability to confide (Cancian, 1986; O'Connor, 1998b).

A good deal has been written about the ways of identifying friends (see O'Connor, 2002/1992; Pahl, 2000; Blatchford, 1998). In this study, regardless of the context of

the friendship, anyone who was seen by the young people themselves as a friend was included. These young people themselves differentiated between the general category of friends and those whom they identified as best/close friends. In this connection, it was striking that some of the children, particularly in the very small rural schools, saw all of the children in their class as friends, although they differentiated between friends and best friends:

*'All the boys in my class are my friends but my three best friends are James, Jon and Gerry' (Ronan Fifth Class, First Level).*

In the mid/late 1980s it was widely suggested that an ideology of femininity which stressed having a boyfriend and spending time with him and giving him priority in their lives implicitly devalued friendships between women (Mc Robbie and McCabe 1982; Hudson, 1984; Beechey, 1986; Rubin, 1985). Since then women's evaluation of themselves has arguably increased so that such friendships may be seen in a less 'pathetic' light. Indeed Griffiths (1988) found that British adolescent girls kept Friday night as 'lasses night' although in that study they still kept Saturday night for their boyfriends. In the present study however, the importance of friendships to the young people was striking-even as compared to relationships with boyfriends:

*'fellas are no 2, when it comes to it. I need my friends, we stick together. There is no separating us. We try our best to do everything together, friends are all that really matter now to me, without them you will get nowhere in life. Friends forever' (Sharon, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Thus quite clearly and in contrast to the earlier pattern, friendships between young women are important as such. The implications of this emotional primacy for a patriarchal control of women rooted in an acceptance of the prioritisation of male needs is fascinating- and has not begun to be discussed. Just as there were few references by girls to boyfriends, there were also few references to girlfriends by the boys –with such references as did occur making it clear that girlfriends for them had very much a recreational (and limited) value in their lives-even being objectified as 'things' they could do without:

*'Only my family and friends hold high importance to me. They are the only things I would live or die by because no matter how annoying they are and how often you fight you know you'll always be side by side with them. My other loves but to a less extent would be women, hurling, soccer and*

*Smithwicks [a beer]. Probably not a good mixture but you have to have fun in your life. Again although they give me great pleasure, they're all things I could survive without' (Jimmy, Transition Year, Second Level).*

This picture is very different from the image of companionate equal relationships between men and women presented by studies in the last century.

Since Granovetter's (1973) work it has been recognised that weak ties can be useful as sources of information. Constraints operating in children's lives, which are not of their own creation, can affect the existence of friendships, as can family moves, illness and death. In more than half of the texts (55 per cent) it was impossible to assess how many friends the young people had. Where it was possible to assess this, the distribution was fairly evenly spread between those who referred to one friend (25 per cent); two or three friends (28 per cent); four or five friends (19 per cent) and six or more (28 per cent). This varied little by age, although the 10-12 year olds were more likely to refer to at least six friends in their texts (28 per cent versus 17 per cent). Amongst the 10-12 year olds, there was little gender difference in these patterns. However, amongst the 14-17 year olds, boys were more likely than the girls to mention just one friend (62 per cent as compared with 28 per cent respectively); with girls aged 14-17 years being much more likely than the boys of that age to refer to two or more friends (72 per cent as compared with 39 per cent). This contradicts the idea that boys are embedded in a wide network of friends—although given that information on numbers of friends was only available in half of the texts, this conclusion is tentative. INSERT TABLE 3.4

The young people also varied as regards the extent to which they actually mentioned their friends' names in their texts. Thus whereas almost two thirds referred to friends, 45 per cent of all the texts referred to named friends. Where individual names were mentioned, it was clear that friendships were overwhelmingly same sex, reflecting the well-established tendency for young people to be embedded in same sex universes (Blatchford, 1998, Pahl, 2000). The 10-12 year olds were much more likely than the older respondents to refer to such named friends (51 per cent versus 13 per cent). This may reflect greater concerns about privacy amongst the older respondents. Girls were

more likely than boys in both age groups to refer to such named friends. The proportion that referred to friends by name was very similar to the proportion referring to best friends- reflecting the fact that it was best friends who tended to be named. Some of the young people's best friendships were clearly long-standing:

*'Janice, my best friend, no-one could be as nice and trustworthy and funny as Janice. She was very good to me with my uncle's death and I love her for that'. (Sinead, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'My best friend is david we have been palying together for 9 years and my other friend Ian. I have been paling with Ian for 4 years....' (Gary, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'From the age of 4 I have been friends with Charles O'Brien and I would saw we will be ontill the day we die' (Andy, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Amongst the boys, not only were best friends less common, but also even where they existed, they were typically less likely to be characterised by intimacy (a pattern that has been documented in other studies-such as Frosh et al, 2002; see also O'Connor, 2002/1992) although they did sometimes have an enduring quality:

*'My best friend is Ger Hannan. I like him he is lots of fun we always go to each others houses a lot and go to the cinema. We have been best friends' sens the start of school....We are going to the same secondary. And I hope we be best friends forever'. (Cathal, Fifth Grade, First Level)*

Griffin (1985) noted that amongst the young women she studied, best/very close friendships were frequently of very long standing. The intensity of the accounts of these relationships was reminiscent of Hey's (1997) and Blatchford's (1998) work:

*'a friend is someone you can trust, rely on, talk to. My best friends name is Ann Murphy we have been friends for four years it all started in first year when I first saw her there was something about her that was so shining it was warm, so happy. She was allways smiling and talking to others'.....All I know is that she can turn to me any time she likes and I can turn to her any time aswell to talk to. She is the greatest friend I ever will have and nothing or nobody will replace her (Linda, Transition Year, Second Level).*

Brannen et al (2001) differentiated between 'being friends', which provided an opportunity to confide and to receive emotional support and 'having friends' which provided a sense of social identity and inclusion. Girls' best friendships were particularly likely to be of the former kind- being characterised by intimate confiding about their fears, sadness and vulnerabilities.

We tend to assume that all young people have best/close friends. However, only 29 per cent of the young people in this study identified such best friends in their texts (see Table 5). This low proportion referring to best friends was particularly striking in view of what is known about the importance of friends as sources of support in their lives. Thus, half of the young men and women in one study (NYCI, 1998) said that the first place they would go if they had a serious problem, such as stress, anxiety or depression, would be to friends. References to such best friends were more common amongst the 10-12 year olds than the 14-17 year olds (33 per cent as compared with 12 per cent respectively). The low proportion of the 14-17 year olds referring to best/close friends in this study is particularly striking and contrasts with the pattern in Blatchford's (1998) study of 16 year olds, where 46 per cent said that they had best friend(s). Similarly Goodenow and Gaier (1990) found that amongst the single women in their study of American college alumni, just over two fifths had at least one close friend. It is difficult to interpret the very much lower references to best/close friends in the present study. It may of course simply reflect methodological differences so that it is possible that the 14-17 year olds in the present study had close friends, but for whatever reason did not refer to them in their texts. However it is also possible that it may reflect high levels of geographical mobility in a society where concepts of friendship continue to presuppose residential stability. Tragic deaths of young people, through suicide, car crashes and drug abuse can also effect the existence of such friendships, as well as changes that are more predictable such as the young person's own progression from First Level to Second Level (Brannen et al, 2001):

*'last year my best friend Rosalind moved' (Ann, Transition Year, Second Level)*  
*'I've lost people close to me. My friend died tragically last year'. (Dave, Transition Year)*

As in Blatchford's study, girls were more likely than boys to identify best friends: 17 per cent of the 14-17 year old girls referred to them as compared with four per cent of the boys of that age. Similar trends as regards the paucity of best/ close friends amongst adolescent boys have emerged in other studies ( Phoenix, 1997; Blatchford, 1998). INSERT TABLE 3.5.



As well as having confiding intimate friendships, the girls also had fun, 'shared activity' type friendships (the kind that boys tended to have, if they had any at all):

*'I have two other very good friends Aine and Elaine. I like them a lot. We always have a good laugh.'* (Orla, Fifth Grade, First Level)

*'in my spare time I hang around with my friends. We dont do much - but we always have a laugh when we're together. We go to disco's play football, other sports and sometimes go to the Collesium a leisure plex'.* (Aileen, Transition Year, Second Level)

Faderman (1981:311) argued that since Freud, close relationships between women were effectively impossible since 'love necessarily means sex and sex between women means lesbian and lesbian means sick'. Such a context heightened women's emotional dependence on men by inhibiting and stigmatising relationships between women. There was very little evidence of this in these young people's texts. However, in a context where sexuality was very much a hidden discourse the possibility that a group of same sex friends could be seen as having sexual overtones was wryly referred to: *'I hang around with a bunch of about 10 girls, it sounds like some lesbian society!.'* (Deirdre, Transition Year, Second Level). Boys' friendships marked out group boundaries, and insofar as they provided support, did so on the basis of their group membership-whether as members of a football team; their school class group; or simply as boys:

*'I have lots of friends that stick by me. And I stick by them.'* (Ian, Fifth Grade, First Level).

In a society where the importance of friends in young people's lives is taken for granted, it was surprising that only roughly two thirds (63 per cent) of these young people referred to friends in their texts and less one third of the whole sample referred to best friends. The texts of the 10-12 year olds were more likely than the 14-17 year olds to refer to these kinds of relationships. Thus, 67 per cent of them referred to friends, as compared with 44 per cent of the older respondents. Only 33 per cent of them referred to best friends, as compared with 12 per cent of the 14-17 year olds. The possibility that these trends may simply reflect the greater variation in the content of the older groups' texts cannot be eliminated.

Girls were most likely to refer to friends in both age groups, although the gender difference was largest amongst the 14-17 year olds (56 per cent as compared with 26 per cent)- a trend that may reflect a kind of male homophobia or a concern with minimizing male emotional vulnerability (Cancian, 1986; Helgeson et al, 1987; O'Connor, 2002/1992; Phoenix, 1997; Frosh et al, 2002). The gender differences were particularly striking in the 14-17 year age group. Thus only 4 per cent of these boys referred to a best friend, as compared with 17 per cent of the girls. Furthermore, there was no suggestion that boys had wider networks of friends. Thus, where it was possible to assess this, 72 per cent of the 14-17 year old girls as compared with 39 per cent of the boys referred to two or more friends. It has been shown (O'Connor et al, 2004) that attendance at single sex boys' schools was associated with fewer references to extended family; to pets; to friends in general; named friends and best friend(s) in particular. It is impossible to know to what extent such contexts create or reflect such attitudes although Lynch's early work (1989b) suggested that the hidden curriculum of single sex boys' schools was effectively hostile to personal development; her later work suggesting that masculinity was equated with 'physical strength, height and sporting ability' (Lynch, 1999:239).

### **Work: Structural Embeddedness and Individualisation**

Because the focus is on young people, work is being defined very broadly indeed to include school attendance as well as part-time work in the paid employment area and helping out in the home, farm and family business. In each of these cases children's involvement requires some kind of expenditure of effort and is hence described as work. In each of these areas we will look at references suggesting young people's experience of structural embeddedness and/or individualisation.

### ***School***

The State's requirement as regards children's school attendance constitutes a non-negotiable social context for children and one of the most fundamental controls over children's bodies (Morgan, 1996) and their use of time and space (Christensen and James, 2001). Prout (1992) has pointed out that what children do at school conforms

to almost any definition of work which is broader than paid employment while Qvortrup (1994, 2001) has argued that children's school work must be seen as work in the sense that it belongs to the society's socio-economic activity and is a key element in contributing to that future economic well-being. This kind of perception was reflected in some of the young people's accounts:

*'It starts at 9.30 then we do Irish, then we get a break at 11 o'clock, then we do more work and then it is lunch time, then we do more work and then it is break time again then more work then it is time to go home. When I go home I do my homework' (Christina, Fifth Class, First Level)*

For the overwhelming majority, school was an inevitable reality that had to be got on with: *'I'm 15 and like the rest of us, I go to school'* (Bernard, Transition Year, Second Level). Some described school as 'boring'- reflecting a kind of passive resistance to a situation where they have little control (Christensen and James, 2001) while for others the experience was more negative and individualised:

*'I do not like going to school but I have to' (Jim, Fifth Class, First Level)*  
*'Every I get up early and go to school to learn (tortured if you will) for five or six hours (Paddy, Fifth Class, First Level)*

School is a hierarchical setting, where the teachers decide on work content, and where the teachers' authority is an ultimate reality. There was a suggestion that such authority was most likely to be accepted by the 10-12 year olds and by the older girls.

It was occasionally indirectly referred to:

*'My teacher is forever trying to teach my class manners' (Aisling, Transition Year, Second Level)*  
*'Fifth class is a very exciting class to be in as we are treated a little bit more like adults' (Lydia, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Implicit in some of the children's accounts were references to the teachers' authority, in the context of his/her responsibility to help them learn and/or an amused wry understanding of the teacher's needs and her authority position:

*'My teacher told me to write about the school and about her because she's the principal, she wants to go down in history, so I'd better mention her' (Cearbhall, Fifth Class, First Level)*

The majority of the references to the teacher in both age groups referred to him/her by the formal title only (i.e. Miss/Mrs/Mr or Sir)- with 27 per cent of 10-12 year old girls doing this as compared with 19 per cent of the boys. An awareness, and implicitly resistance to, control within the school setting occasionally emerged amongst the 14-17 year olds (see Chapter 4). The young people varied in terms of their orientation to

the academic content- such orientations being more suggestive of individualised preferences. The 10-12 year old girls were marginally most likely to refer to subject preferences (16 per cent of them doing so as compared with 11 per cent of the boys of that age). In her study of First level schools, Devine (2003) found that a consistent pattern emerged as regards children's subject preferences- with Art and Physical Educations being most favoured, reflecting their perception of these as fun activities; and Irish, Maths and English being most disliked. There was also some evidence of this in this study, with girls being most likely to refer to Art, and boys and girls being equally likely to refer to their preferences as regards Maths/Sciences and Environmental Studies:

*"My favourite subject is art and pe. I hate maths and Irish" (Eileen, Fifth Class, First Level)*

However, there seemed to be a relationship between boys' experience of school and their feelings of competence in that situation. School with its 'work, work, work' ethos in some cases underlined these inadequacies- the educational priorities of a particular teacher in some cases exacerbating the situation when the boys were not good at his/her chosen subject:

*'My favorite subject is maths when I know how to do them' (Kieran, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'I hate school because all we do is work, work, work with my teacher- all he does is Irish. My worst subject is Irish.'* (Kevin, Fifth Class, First Level)

Only a tiny minority of the 14-17 year olds referred to favourite subjects. The reasons they gave for liking particular subjects varied widely, with, for example Eoin saying that: *'Art is the only subject that I have never been forced into learning'*; while Joe simply said that reading Irish History was one of his hobbies. Hence one might suggest that Second Level offered greater possibilities as regards developing individual preferences in academic content. However, particularly amongst the 14-17 year old girls, there was a great deal of enthusiasm for the experiences they had been exposed to in Transition Year: including but not restricted to opportunities for increased self-knowledge:

*'I really like Transition Year. It has been the best year in my life. I have tried many new things and discovered loads about myself.'* Gina, Transition Year, Second Level).

*'I'm in Transition year and it's great! We're doing loads of new stuff like philosophy, surfing, driving and 'positive living'.'* (Leanne, Transition Year)

Sheila refers to the activities they participated in over the year: including a trip to an adventure centre (*'fantastic'*), putting on a school musical (*'great fun to do and also a great success'*) and a trip to Kerry for the week-end (*'great fun and everybody enjoyed it'*). Others stressed the strong feelings of group closeness that had emerged:

*'As the year went on the class came closer and closer'* (Elaine, Transition Year, Second Level)

*'My friends are a variety of mad, fun- loving, insane people. And I love them all. Remembering all the laughs we've had together, laughing at things so hard that your throat hurts and you feel physically exhausted afterwards. The craic we have had both in school and nights out has been unbelievable'* (Siobhan, Transition Year, Second Level)

Amongst the boys, it was school based sports activities that were most likely to be referred to. They wrote about the teams they played on, the positions they occupied on them, the successes they had had; and the fact that they talked about these at school:

*'Then at School, many people that I know play and go to school with me so we talk about the match'* (Mick, Transition Year, Second Level)

References to relationships with individual teachers were most likely to be made by the 10-12 year olds: with the girls of this age being marginally more likely than their male counterparts to do this (31 per cent as compared with 23 per cent). As in Devine (2003) and Brannen et al's (2001) study such references occurred in the context of references to learning situations- and in this study, particularly in the context of new experiences and/or being 'helped to learn' in a creative way:

*'I have a very nice teacher called miss fitsimons. She does very nice things with us like French week and Africa week. For French week teacher made crepes for us and then we brought in cups to paint Eiffel Tower's on them. For Africa week we were allowed dress up as African's. We tasted lot's of African food...'* (Ronan, Fifth Class, First Level)

For many children and young people, relationships with peers are an important feature of the school setting (see Mizen et al, 2000; Mayall, 2001): making and maintaining friendships being also referred to in this study as one of the principal reasons for coming to school in the girls' eyes:

*'It hasnt been too bad [Transition Year] as I have two of my best friends in the class with me'* (Karen, Transition Year, Second Level)

*'I think school is not that bad because.... you meet all your friends'* ( Laurie, Fifth Class, First Level)

Such a focus might well be associated with girls' greater acceptance of, and performance in the school context (Smyth and Hannan, 2000; O'Connor, 1998a and 2000; Lynch, 1999). Such ties both increase their enjoyment of the school experience, and constitute alternative foci of emotional cathexis and identity. Amongst boys, where the main focus was on competence, the situation was potentially more fraught for those who were not high achievers-a situation which is exacerbated by 'streaming' of boys- a practice that is common in boys' schools (Lynch and Lodge, 2002).

The importance of friendships amongst girls can be located in the wider context of a relational individualism. In some cases this was reflected in the content of the curriculum. Mac an Ghiall (1994) suggested that an occupational focussed type curriculum for girls revolved around the construction of 'caring subjectivities'- a perspective that reflected and reinforced a culture of familism. Such a curriculum can be criticised as ultimately lowering working class girls' occupational aspirations- although where it occurred it tended to be seen as a positive development- something that is not perhaps surprising given the importance of relationships in girls narratives:

*'In my school we done a babysitting course and since that I have been offered a lot more babysitting jobs... I feel that I am a lot more independent and am able to deal with situations on my own and think things out for myself' (Mary, Transition Year, Second Level)*

For others, school was seen as irrelevant to their future occupations-and as a lot less attractive than the paid work that was typically being undertaken part-time:

*'I hate school I like to work [as a mechanic] more than go to school. Each Monday when I wake up I get a pain in my stomach thinking about school. (Ken Wylie, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Overall then, although boys and girls saw school as a taken-for-granted experience, for some young people, it was an interesting experience. Particularly for the older girls, it was source of friendship and an occasion to meet and interact with friends; while for the boys, it was a site of sporting activities, and an arena where they could demonstrate their competence. Hence it is arguably not coincidental that it is boys who are most likely to leave school early and who are less likely to do well academically.

### ***Paid work and Helping out***

In Qvortrup's typology (1991), wage work, paid family work and unpaid work done in the home were also identified as types of children's work while Zleiter (2002) defined such work even more broadly to include children's economic activities as producers of various kinds. Leonard (2005) also stressed the importance of looking at children's paid employment, seeing it as a reflection of children's agency and as a source of human and social capital. In this section we look at references to these kinds of work, focusing on the structure within which such work is performed.

The most obvious aspect of work is children's individual paid work. It has been shown that just under half of the Transition Year students worked in paid employment (Mc Coy and Smyth, 2004; Leonard's 2001 and 2002) with lower levels in Hansen et al (2001) study of young people aged 14-16 in the UK and in Lynch and Lodge's (2002) study of Second level students. It seems probable that many of those with paid jobs did not refer to them in the present study since only 13 per cent of the 14-17 year olds mentioned having paid jobs (14 per cent of the girls and 12 per cent of the boys)- with less than one per cent of the 10-12 year olds referring to them. As in other studies, the qualitative data suggested that this paid employment was overwhelmingly in low skilled work in fast food outlets, restaurants, bars and shops. References to it by the young people in the present study suggested that it was undertaken to maintain their life style (in terms of entertainment, alcohol; holidays; clothes etc) and to give them a sense of social and personal independence (Leonard, 2001; Morgan, 2000; Mizen et al 2001; Mc Coy and Smyth, 2004):

*'I started a part-time job to earn some extra money. I need to save all of it because I'm going on holiday in two months time with my three best friends. ...I love buying clothes and I love money' (Anna, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'Most week ends I work in a pub. Its good work because I get to meet new people (Eugene, Transition Year, Second Level)*

It was striking that hierarchy, which is a key element in paid employment was typically not adverted to. It is suggested that this is associated with the fact that the young people saw themselves as choosing to undertake this activity. This perception

sat uneasily with a perception of themselves as powerless within hierarchical structures.

Personal responsibility for an economically productive area (such as keeping hens) was occasionally referred to – something that is reminiscent of Third World childhoods (Punch, 2001). If we define production as ‘any effort that creates value’ (Zelizer, 2002:380) the qualitative data suggested that young people were involved in other kinds of productive activity, and that these were had more to do with relational interdependence than economic independence (Becker et al, 2001):

*‘I enjoy helping my father with the farm work’ (Alan, Fifth Class, First Level)*  
*‘I like to help my dad with the sheep. I like going around the fields with my dog’*  
*(Elaine, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Such help was not restricted to parents. Thus, particularly for those children who were embedded in a kin network, helping grandparents, uncles etc. was described in a taken for granted way:

*‘Every summer I help my fathers brother John shear sheep. He farms my grandfathers’s land. My grandfather on my mothers’s side is a fisherman. I sometimes help him too’ (Alan, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Such helping out occasionally transferred to other contexts such as helping out in family businesses such as shops. In these contexts, the activity was located in a pre-existing network of relationship. It was different from formal employment in that frequently there was no question of payment: it was seen simply as part of family life (Zelizer, 2002). However, where the children saw their activity as work rather than as helping out they were more likely to refer to getting paid –even when this activity occurred in the context of a parent/child relationship: *‘In the summer I go out working with my father [a builder]. I get paid £25 a week’ (Tom, Fifth Class, First Level).*

For some, the distinction between paid and unpaid work was blurred:

*‘I cut the grass for my Antey and she gives me five pounds an hour. It takes 3 hours to cut and edge the lawn’ (Paul, Fifth Class, First Level)*

It is possible that in some cases the financial element reflected an attempt to maintain a balance of indebtedness between households. These kinds of cross household



financial contributions could occasionally be seen in the payment of allowances by the extended family to children (without any reference to work).

Particular kinds of work, such as 'love labour' (Lynch, 1989a), involving energy, time and producing a solidary relationship (Lynch and Mc Laughlin, 1995:257) can be done by children as well as adults: 'Most children will care *about* and sometimes care *for* family members and significant others' (Becker et al, 2001:70). Nixon et al (2006) found that the children and young people in their study saw themselves as providing a caring role when parents were sick; providing emotional support by listening to parents worries etc. Thus children are not simply recipients of care, but are active contributors to care. Indeed Brannen et al (2001) stressed the ways in which children's help in the home was related to an ethic of care, and reflected what Mason (1996) has called 'sentient activity: children's sensitivity and response to others' needs.

In this study, boys were particularly likely to link their own help in the home to the love and tending they received: *'I love my Mom a lot. I help my Mom a lot in exchange that she is so kind' (Adam Fifth Grade, First Level); 'I help my father wash the car and still I help my mother with the dishes. Just to repay them'. (Ian, Fifth Grade, First Level)*. Implicit in these statements is the idea that in some way parental love and tending could be repaid: raising issues related to a sense of entitlement to such care (Lewis et al, 2002). There was a suggestion that boys were more likely to see such help in the home as in some way repaying their parents care of them- a phenomenon that may reflect their awareness of unearned patriarchal privileging (O'Connor, 2000). Evidence of such privileging is reflected in the fact that boys get more pocket money than girls (Mc Coy and Smyth, 2004), while they do less domestic work in the family (see Leonard, 2004b).

Paradoxically in a society where children's work is not valued (or indeed seen as really legitimate) children's references to a variety of work experiences seemed to be largely positive. Although paid employment was valued as a source of money and

independence, the relationship between effort and money was much more complex than this. In some cases work was defined as 'helping out' within the context of a supportive relationship and thus exempted from the normal employee expectation of payment (although some monetary recognition might be given). Relationships were the context for undertaking all but paid work, with the children's experience of such activities being generally taken for granted or actually positive.

## **Summary**

The trends emerging in this chapter are both very predictable and very unexpected. Thus, as one might expect, the overwhelming majority of these young people referred to family and friends in their texts-thus underlining the reality of a relational discourse. The 10-12 year olds were more likely than the 14-17 year olds to refer to nuclear and extended family; to friends in general; to identify six or more friends; to identify named friends and best friends and to be most likely to refer to pets. Boys, 14-17 year olds in particular, were less likely than girls of the same age to refer to family; less likely to define family to include extended family; less likely to refer to friends, less likely to refer to confiding in those friends, and very unlikely indeed to refer to a best friend. The importance of confidants can of course be overstated-representing as it does a kind of feminisation of love (Cancian, 1986). Nevertheless, particularly in adolescence, opportunities to confide are important. Furthermore, although earlier work on male adults showed that they were likely to have more extensive ties than adult women, in this as in Griffin's classic study, there was evidence that girls referred to more extensive networks. Thus, 39% of the 14-17 year old boys referred to at least two friends as compared with 72% of the girls. Thus, it appears that the movement away from family ties in mid-adolescence is not compensated for by the number or the quality of friendship ties, as least as indicated by the accounts of such relationships in these texts, with a relatively bleak emotional landscape for young men being depicted.

This chapter has also illustrated the range of what can be loosely regarded as work activities in which these young people were engaged. As one would expect, their

enjoyment of these activities and their reasons for participating in them varied. In this they are no different to adults. It was striking that, particularly for boys, school, appeared to be unrelieved by the diversions of friendship. The frequency and enthusiasm of the references to helping out on farms pose interesting questions as to what substitutes for such activity within an increasingly urban society. Finally, within a society where there is a sort of inchoate concern about authority, there were relatively few indications that these young people were aware of power hierarchies. The rarity with which love is named suggests that somehow a discourse of love that is not sexual has become invisible.

Overall, then this chapter shows that young people's relational discourse as reflected in their references to ties with family and friends in their texts are affected by age and gender. A continuum of relatedness can be identified: with 10-12 year old girls being at one end of the continuum and 14-17 year old boys being at the other end. In this context, it does not seem too fanciful to suggest that typically adolescent male problems in Western Society such as high levels of suicide, alcoholism and delinquency (Clare, 2000) may be related to such a bleak emotional landscape.

**Table 3.1: Age by References to Family controlling for Gender**

Gender	Reference to Family	10-12	14-17	Total
Girls	Yes	91%	64%	86%
Boys	Yes	84%	42%	78%
Overall	Yes	87%	56%	82%

**Table 3.2: Age By Type of Family Described Controlling for Gender**

Gender	Type of Family Described	10-12	14-17	Total
Girls	Nuclear	59%	42%	57%
Boys	Nuclear	58%	32%	55%
Total	Nuclear	58%	38%	56%
Girls	Extended	28%	13%	25%
Boys	Extended	23%	5%	21%
Total	Extended	25%	10%	23%

**Table 3.3: Age by Reference to Pets, Naming of Pets controlling for Gender**

Age		10-12	14-17	Total
Girls	Reference to Pets	38%	9%	33%
	Naming of Pets	25%	5%	22%
Boys	Reference to Pets	28%	7%	25%
	Naming of Pets	16%	2%	15%
Total	Reference to Pets	33%	8%	30%
	Naming of Pets	21%	4%	19%

**Table 3.4: Age by Number of Friends Mentioned controlling for Gender**

Gender	No. of Friends Mentioned	10-12	14-17	Total
Girls	1	26%	28%	26%
	2-5	47%	52%	47%
	6 or more	28%	20%	27%
Boys	1	23%	62%	24%
	2-5	48%	39%	48%
	6 or more	29%	-	29%
Total	1	25%	34%	25%
	2-5	47%	49%	47%
	6 or more	28%	17%	28%

**Table 3. 5: Age by A/ Reference to Friends and B/ Friends Named C/Best Friends controlling for Gender**

A/Reference to Friends	10-12	14-17	All ages
By Girls	73%	56%	70%
By Boys	60%	26%	56%
Total	67%	44%	64%
<b>B/ Friends Named</b>			
By Girls	56%	17%	49%
By Boys	46%	6%	41%
Total	51%	13%	45%
<b>C/To Best Friends</b>			
By Girls	39%	17%	36%
By Boys	25%	4%	22%
Total	33%	12%	29%

## **Chapter 4: Discourses about Time**

### **Introduction**

James and Prout (1990:216) suggested 'that the social construction of time may be crucial to the study of childhood' -both in the sense of thinking about childhood as an institution and thinking about the lives of children themselves, particularly in a context where there is not 'a common temporal rhythm' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002:91) in the family, since its life is structured by different social institutions. As suggested in Chapter 1 it has been widely argued that an important aspect of individualisation is the disembedding of the life course and the substitution of a choice biography for a standard biography, with life plans becoming 'the substantial content of the reflexively organised trajectory of the self' (Giddens, 1991: 85; see also Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Berger et al 1974). Brannen and Nilsen (2002:49) also noted that the life course was undergoing a process of 'destandardisation, both in terms of the prescribed order of its phases and also in terms of the linearity of its progress' with the very notion of youth as a preparation for adulthood undergoing change. Thus although on the one hand, adulthood was deferred longer as young people spent more time in education, on the other hand, in a rapidly changing world, preparing for adulthood was difficult 'when past experience seems no guide to the present' (Sennett, 1998:97). Hence paradoxically both life plans and an inability or unwillingness to make plans could be seen as characteristic of late modernity. In this chapter we will look at the breadth and depth of young people's temporal orientation in a context where almost two thirds of them referred to the future in some way and where age and/or gender seemed to make little difference.

### **Temporal Discourses**

A variety of methodologies have been used to look at such temporal orientations. Thomson and Holland (2002) used lifelines in their study of young people in their late teens and early twenties so to get at their 'imagined adulthoods'. They found that there was agreement on an imagined adulthood involving a relationship and children

by age 35 years, in a context where educational and occupational aspirations were generally high. However there were also gender and class differences, with the working class women particularly feeling ‘that they must take on the role of both male and female in the traditional model, they must have a career, a good job, and have children, a family’ (Thomson and Holland, 2002: 342) arguably reflecting the ‘normative, experiential and practical resources’ that young people had access to (Nilsen and Brannen, 2002:39). Nilsen (1999) usefully highlighted the importance of systematically differentiating between common sense terms such as dreams, hopes and plans. She suggested that dreams belonged to a more or less timeless realm; were identified without regard to constraints and demanded no commitment from the person having these dreams. Hopes were more tangible and concrete in so far as they were seen as within the realm of the possible. Plans were the most concrete and involved the identification of specific ways of moving towards long-term goals. Nilsen makes no reference to ambitions but conceptually, these can be seen as more specific than dreams and hopes, but less specific than plans. However, Thomson and Holland did not differentiate between young people’s dreams and plans. Indeed, there has also been some argument about the extent to which young people in late modern societies have ambitions and make detailed plans about their future. Anderson et al (2005) found that the majority of the young people in their study had five year ambitions. The most common type of such ambitions related to the paid employment area (promotion; changing jobs; running their own business)- with only a very small minority referring to an ambition to marry or to have children. This may reflect the fact that the latter phenomena are seen as less under their control than the former (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006). Indeed only roughly one third of Anderson et al’s respondents planned for a year or more ahead; less than one in ten had lifetime plans and only roughly a third of those who had plans referred to being married/in a relationship. Hence as suggested by Brannen and Nilsen (2006) the apparent differences in the two studies may be seen as ultimately reflecting differences in methodology and terminology.

Drawing on focus group material with young people in the UK and Norway, Brannen and Nilsen (2002) identified three broad kinds of temporal orientations. This schema is used to classify the young people's temporal orientations in the present study.

### ***Living in the Present- Keeping the future at Bay***

For those in this category, individualisation was associated with choice, and the future was in many cases a daunting prospect. Thus they deferred the future and had an 'extended present' orientation: 'The future is in effect taken into the here and now. It loses its meaning in the sense that people are unable to think about the long term, much less plan for it. Lived experience is imprisoned in an all-pervasive extended present' (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002: 52). Those who had this kind of perspective did not want to think about the future or about taking on adult responsibilities. They focussed on enjoying being young, doing fun things, not planning or thinking about the future, with the short-term time perspective being all encompassing.

Such attitudes were not peculiar to those in this study. Thus, Brannen and Nilsen (2002) noted that in their study the young Norwegian women stressed the importance of living their lives in the present, and did not want to think about the future or about assuming what they saw as adult family responsibilities. Leccardi (2005: 141) identified a similar phenomenon, which she called 'presentification' amongst the Italian young people she studied. She referred to them as: 'nomads of the present' 'they explore, enveloped in impermanence'. Such an orientation can be associated with a drifting away from a normative expectation of 'being there for others' to claiming 'a piece of life for oneself' (Buchner, 1990:77; see also Beck-Gernsheim 1983) in a context where such feelings seemed to be incompatible with their normative views of adult womanhood. Some of those in the present study, as in Gordon et al's (2001) study, wanted to postpone adulthood and 'to be young forever' (this focus on youth also arguably reflecting a wider gendered concern with youthful physical attractiveness);

*'All I want is to enjoy life and I also would not mind to stay young forever'*  
(Claire, Transition Year, Second Level)

*'I cant really imagine myself in about ten years time but I'm not looking forward to it that much. I'd just love to stay young forever. Some hope!'* (Emma, Transition Year, Second Level)

Giddens (1991:28) argued that 'Living in the 'risk society' means living with a calculative attitude to the open possibilities of action, positive and negative, with which, as individuals and globally, we are confronted in a continuous way in our contemporary social existence': such experiences generating self-doubt and anxiety. As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) would also lead one to expect, a touch of fear about growing up was evident in some of the texts. Indeed paradoxically although school is often depicted as a source of pressure in young people's lives, young people, particularly young women expressed their apprehension about leaving school and making decisions about their future life

*'I still have no idea what so ever, about what I want to do after my leaving and that scares me a little'* (Anne, Transition Year, Second Level)

*'To-day as I sit in a relaxed classroom in a carefree world, I know the weight of the world is waiting to drop heavily on my shoulders, but for the moment I am happy'* (Hilda, Transition Year, Second Level)

*'I'm growing up I suppose.. The world is a lot bigger to me now and a lot scarier'* (Deirdre)

It is possible that young men were inhibited about expressing such feelings of fear and anxiety because of the incompatibility of emotional vulnerability and hegemonic concepts of masculinity (Cleary, 2005). However a focus on a hedonistic extended present particularly occurred amongst the 14-17 year old boys in this study (similar patterns emerged in Gordon et al, 2001). Underlying this was a strong feeling of wanting to shut out the future and live in the present and so 'to diminish the uncertainties of the future' (Nowotony, 1994:58):

*'Right now I have nearly no ambitions or hopes in life only to enjoy it and I have enough to enjoy right now. I love music, soccer, comedy, reading comedy and watching comedy'* (Wally, Transition Year, Second Level).

*'The most important thing to me is to live life and have lots of fun. I want to enjoy my life and live for to-day'* (John, Transition Year, Second Level)

*'Forget about peers, be yourself and have fun. Life isint THAT serious'* (Don, Transition Year Second Level)

*'There is one thing in life I know already whatever I end up doing, it might be illegal, it might be legal but one thing I know for sure. I am going to enjoy my life and live it to the max ...and if we all die in the year 2,000 I will drink to that'* (Mark, Transition Year, Second Level)



Similar kinds of views were expressed by the young Italians in Leccardi's study (2005) and described as common amongst Portuguese young men: *'It seems they are afraid of dying to morrow. They look behind and think I didn't have fun'* (O'Connor et al, 2002) –suggesting a kind of frantic enjoyment of pleasure in a context where there was no confidence that a predictable future existed.

Such was the aversion to commitment that in some cases even going out with a boyfriend was seen as the antithesis of fun. Thus Bernadette (*Transition Year, Second Level*) says that she does not have a boyfriend at present: *'and I have to admit I don't really want one I want to have some fun before I start going out with someone in a serious relationship.'* Sue (*Transition Year, Second Level*) who did have a boyfriend similarly stressed that: *'Its not serious. We just concentrate on having fun. You're only young once!'*; while Ciara said of her relationship: *'By the end of the Summer, I would say that it will be over but I hope to enjoy it while it lasts'*.

Occasionally, amongst the 14-17 year old boys', as in the case of the Macho Lads, the narrative was a 'hard man' one (Thomson, 2000; Jagger, 2002), referring to risk taking types of activities, including fighting and flirting with the law, such activities being seen by Connell (1995a) as elements in hegemonic masculinity. In Ireland although very high levels of alcohol consumption are common amongst both boys and girls, it is young male to male violence around clubs and pubs that has become an increasingly common aspect of young people's lives, regardless of their social class background (Inglis, 2006). Such violence can be seen as reflecting an endorsement of hegemonic masculinity and the failure of young men to achieve such hegemony- and hence can be seen as a form of 'protest masculinity' (Connell, 1995b; see also Canaan, 1996). Thus young men expect to benefit from a 'patriarchal dividend...in terms of honour, prestige, and the right to command' (Connell, 1995b: 82) but their attempts to claim it are seen as illegitimate. Indeed as young men, they can be seen as a potential threat and as such are subject to volatile and unaccountable authority (exercised by 'bouncers' at clubs/discos). They are thus in 'a position of powerlessness where the existing cultural resources for a gendered claim to power'

are not available to them (Haywood and Mac an Ghiall, 2003:39). In this situation picking a fight can be seen as demonstrating that they possess one source of gendered power (physical strength). Doing this 'for a laugh' can be seen as indicating a rejection of a system which effectively ignores their expectations as regards a patriarchal dividend (see Edley and Wetherell, 1996 re attempts to normalise violence by describing it 'as a laugh).

*' Then occasionally we go out to a disco, we get prepared by buying drink for that.... We usually buy the drink and go to a secluded area to drink and then have more going out on the bus... If you go out without being caught [by the Guards] ... then you meet your friends and queue to get in. And if you don't get in you might have to wait outside and maybe pick a fight for a laugh' (Mick, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Amongst the 14-17 year olds in the present study there was a strong feeling that the future was being literally held at bay. For the girls, fear and anxiety was part of their present orientation, whereas in the case of the boys, the focus was more on the pursuit of frantic hedonistic pleasure, with both boys and girls wanting to have fun, take risks and avoid commitments.

### ***References to a Contingent Future***

The conventional way to analyse women's lives has been in terms of a gender model focusing on biological or domestic events such as child bearing or rearing while men's lives have typically been analysed in terms of a job model focusing on the labour market (Walby, 1997). Those in this category saw the future as something to be adapted to and negotiated, 'a challenge which they believe they can master' (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002:60)- involving trying out different jobs and life styles as they went along. In Brannen and Nilsen's study, the majority of those in this category were women. It has been suggested that men may have 'a more linear, forward planning model of time' women having 'one which is partly cyclical...., involving the allocation and juggling of a multiplicity of times' (Morgan 1996: 149). Brannen and Nilsen (2002) as well as Thomson and Holland (2002) noted that the young women in their studies thought about the future in a gendered way and were conscious of having to make decisions about having children. However, part of the destandardisation of the life course involves the blurring of gender differences so that traditional gendered

notions of adulthood are less relevant. Indeed young Swedish women rather ironically remarked that the net effect of such developments was a deskilling of boys and girls

*'Everything has been evened out. Before girls were better at taking care of children because that was what they did. The guys were out fixing things. Nowadays guys cant fix cars and we girls can barely cook  
Now we are all equal. Nobody can do anything'* (O'Connor et al, 2002:100)

In the present study, those in this category, as suggested by Brannen and Nilsen, saw the future in terms of trying out different options:

*'I dont want to be stuck in a job where I'd dread going to work everyday. I want to be able...to have no regrets about my life. That's why I'd like to get the chance to experience everything and travel the world maybe someday ( Carol, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'What if I don't get into a College? I don't want to spend my life in some boring job nor do I want to be married with about three [children] by the time I'm twenty seven' (Mary, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Furthermore, as in their study, references to a contingent future were more likely to occur amongst girls than boys. Indeed, amongst the 10-12 year olds, there were some elements of contingency even relating to their occupational dreams or hopes:

*'When I grow up I would [like] to be an actress and if I didn't make it to an actress, I'd love to be a lawyer. But right now I'm just going to finish primary school' (Christine, Fifth Class, First Level),*

Women still overwhelmingly do domestic work in the household in Ireland (McGinnity et al, 2005). There was no evidence in the present study of any awareness of difficulties as regards reconciling work and family. Furthermore, and in contrast to the trends emerging amongst Irish 18-30 year olds (O'Connor et al, 2002), there was no evidence of a chasm between the recognition of discourses about equality and the perception that it did not exist- something that may simply reflect differences in the ages of those in the two studies. However, as in Hannan et al's (1996) study the young women in the present study anticipated that they would be in paid employment as well as having children. In some cases having children was seen as indicative of settling down after they had got an interesting job. The suggestion that motherhood was to be postponed until after they had seen a bit of life also emerged in Gordon and Lahelma's (2002) study:

*'When I grow up I would like to go on to third level education. After I finish that I would like to travel the world....When I have completed my travelling I would like to get an interesting job such as a Lawyer or Silicator. But when I get*

*a bit oldre I would like to settle down and have a family' (Aimee, Fifth Class, First Level)*

It was striking that the girls in both studies did not see relationships as something that could be planned for and in the present study they referred to them as dreams or hopes-with some of the older girls being almost embarrassed about these 'old dreams' (O'Connor et al, 2002- see also Gordon and Lahelma, 2002):

*'Someday I hope to marry and have, maybe two children. I suppose I am just an old fashioned girl at heart. Especially with the ever increasing divorce rate' (Ann, Transition Year, Second Level).*

*'My hopes ... to meet the man of my dreams. Have some children, go to college to study to be an accounting And have a happy life with my husband, children and my best friend Lindsey' (Charlene, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Intriguingly, amongst the 14-17 year old boys, even where they mentioned that they wanted to have children, the word 'man' or father' was not used- again suggesting that there was an ambivalence about the explicit recognition of gender:

*'I hope to grow up to be a caring and honest person who will always think of other people's needs before my own.....I hope to do my bit to keep the kindness in the people through having some children of my own and bringing them up the right way through honesty and care'. (Sean, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Overall then it was striking that references to a contingent future were most likely to occur amongst the 14-17 year olds, particularly the girls. They saw relationships as more contingent than educational or occupational success; with references to such relationships being in the realm of hopes and dreams as compared with the more specific detailed plans and ambitions in the educational and occupational areas.

### ***Anticipating a Predictable Future***

Those who saw the future as predictable and who thought it was possible to identify and work towards long term goals were identified as 'the true planners' (Brannen and Nilsen, 2002: 60). They saw 'future adulthood as relatively certain and secure as long as they worked hard to attain their long-term goals'. Miles (2000, p.114) has been amongst those who have highlighted the 'paradoxical situation that although on the one hand, individualisation implies greater agency with individuals shaping their identities, lifestyles etc, on the other hand the same media that bring about

individualisation also bring about standardisation.’ Thus although the market, money, law, mobility, education etc, heighten possibilities as regards individualisation, as noted by Beck (1992) they also effectively standardise the life course. Thus paradoxically they suggest that in a highly individualistic society, it is possible to see the life course as relatively predictable.

It was striking that particularly but not exclusively amongst the 10-12 year olds, it was very common to anticipate a standardised life course and a predictable future involving education, travel, paid employment, and (very occasionally), marriage/relationship and children. These trends were also evident in Gordon and Lahelma’s (2002) study where the main focus was also on education and careers. Thus, their orientation to school was rooted in its facilitation of the acquisition of academic credentials and career opportunities in the context of a model of the future that saw education as predictably related to occupation. Typically these young people did not use the word ‘plan’, although there was considerable detail in some texts (particularly the younger girls’) that suggested the existence of plans. Furthermore although these could be seen as individualised late modern life plans, they were also suggestive of collective socially approved life paths:

*‘I will be starting in the convent in the Year 2000. For my Junior Cert I want to study French, Business Studies and Art and for my Leaving Cert I want to study French, Business Studies and Home economics. Then I want to go to university and study Science and Physics, And then get into vet school, graduate and become a vet (Mary, Fifth Class, First Level).*

*‘I plan to do well in my leaving Cert. I’m going to be an asccounting’ (Jane, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*‘When I leave Secondary School I hope to have a good Leaving Cert and study Civil Engineering in Goodplace IT. (Donal, Transition Year, Second Level).*

The perceived causal relationship between study and educational achievement was wryly underlined by Geraldine (below) who said that if she believed the world was going to end, she would not be bothered spending her time studying. However occasionally young people like Billy completely rejected this taken for granted equation and mapped out a completely different trajectory in self-employment:

*‘People believe that as Nostradamus suggested that there will be a World War three, ending the world. I personally don’t believe it. Would I be wasting time in school or doing homework?’ (Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'I am in school waiting for a few hundred points. But I don't need them. I do not wish to go to college. I have no wish to get a job. I wish to set up my own business, be my own boss..not have people tell me what to do, not have people half my age getting promoted ahead of me when I am older.... All you need is just one idea along with the determination and persistence to make your business work. (Billy, Transition Year, Second Level)*

However for many of the young people, going on to Third Level was a taken for granted step, even where they did not know what they wanted to be or to do, arguably reflecting the level of cultural capital they had already absorbed (Bourdieu, 1977 and 1989):

*'I'm not sure what I want to be when I get older, but after I leave school I want to go to College and graduate and get a good job', ( Marion, Transition Year, Second Level)*

This is a relatively new pattern since only a quarter of those with Leaving Certificates went to Third Level twenty years ago, while the overwhelming majority of their parents were unlikely to have gone on to Third Level. Indeed, currently only roughly half of those with Leaving Certificates go on to Third Level (Smyth and Hannan, 2000). Furthermore, since married women's employment in Ireland did not dramatically increase until the 1990s (O'Connor, 2000A) most of their mothers were unlikely to have been in paid employment for much of their lives. Not surprisingly then references to following their mothers' occupations/career paths were uncommon, although they did occasionally occur. There was a suggestion that those who referred to their mother's occupation seemed less daunted by the world of paid employment:

*'The future for me is a large question mark but hopefully it will be bright. The one thing I am sure about is my career. I hope to work with handicapped children and follow in my mother's foot steps'.(Kate, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'When I am older I would like to be fashion designer, Own a famous factory (or shop) or be a scientist like my mum' (Lorna, Transition Year, Second Level).*

It has been argued that the definition of womanhood continues to involve a caring or servicing and nurturing role for women (O'Connor, 1998a; Jagger, 2002; Skeggs 1997). As one might expect then, a focus on occupations that provided caring opportunities (such as primary teaching and nursing) occurred in the 10-12 year olds' texts. Indeed, non-traditional occupational choices, such as becoming a vet, were sometimes constructed in caring terms: *'My ambitions are to become a vet and save animals' (Lorna, Fifth Grade, First Level)*. Amongst the 10-12 year olds other

stereotypically female occupation referred to included hairdresser, model and ‘make-up artist’. There were also references to other kinds of occupations, including interior designer, lifeguard, maths teacher, lawyer and ‘leader of my country’ (the last two Presidents of Ireland have been female lawyers). The extent to which such choices were embedded in their taken-for-granted view of the world was reflected in the fact that even when the choices were stereotypical in gender terms, virtually none of the young people recognised this.

Stereotypical choices were not exclusive to the 10-12 year old girls. The kinds of occupations the 10-12 year old boys referred to also tended to be stereotypically male: a Formula 1 driver, a pilot, barrister, chef, carpenter, computer programmer, fireman etc. Some of the boys specifically referred to their own first hand experience of the occupations of relatives, friends or neighbours (for example, mechanics, firemen, truck drivers, farmers etc): *‘My father drives a digger and when I grow up I want to be a digger driver or a mechanic’* (Dermot, Fifth Class, First Level). Occasionally their occupational aspirations were such that they implied that they would remain in or return to their local area: working on their fathers’ farm, or as a mechanic or carpenter, positions which they were growing into as they worked alongside the adults in those communities (see Paulgaard, 2002). The young boys sometimes explicitly referred to heroic aspects of these local positions while for others the main focus was on more global immortality and/or fame:

*‘My ambition.. is to be a fireman. Their dedication and heroism is an inspiration in my life espically since I witnessed them in action’ (Alan, Fifth Grade, First Level)*

*‘When I grow up I would like to be an artist because you would be remembered for a huge amount of years if you did an excellent painting’ (Tom, Fifth Grade, First Level)*

Wildermuth and Dalsgaard (2006:16 and 21) suggested that, even in impoverished societies, the media widened ‘cognitive and experiential horizons’ and allowed ‘for the imaginary identification with representational others’, although such imaginative possibilities often coincided with more mundane expectations. In the present study, there was some evidence of this- with glamorous ideas concerning occupations being drawn not only from the media but also from the world of professional football:

*'My ambition is to play for Manchester United and be famous' (Ian, Fifth Grade, First Level)*

*'My ambition in life at the moment is to be a rock'n'roll star and to be a famous music icon of some sort' (Barry, Transition Year, Second Level)*

In contrast to Thomson and Holland's (2002) study there was little evidence in the present study that girls or boys ideas about the future simply focussed on family. However this may reflect the fact that the lifelines used in that study forced the young people to think on a longer time scale than in the present study. In any case, in the present study there were few explicit references to wanting to be a mother/father or to have children (and those were frequently combined with references to occupational positions):

*'I'd like to be a teacher when I get older and a mother' (Kerri, Fifth Grade, First Level)*

*'My ambitions are to take over my father's business and to be a father myself.' (Graham, Fifth Grade, First Level).*

Future occupational choices were very much less common amongst the 14-17 year olds. Where they occurred, many of them were non-traditional, arguably indicating the reflexivity of those making such choices- with occasional references to the pressure they felt under in making them:

*'I hope to become a garda and work my way up to work in the Drugs Squad.' (Michelle, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'My ultimate ambition in the area of occupations is to become a glassblower....My family have been very supportive and have encouraged me to follow my dream, but of course there is the odd person who will laugh and try to ridicule me' (Elsie, Transition Year, Second Level).*

In countries such as Ireland where the importance of men in the public arenas has been associated with infantilising them in the domestic arena, the male breadwinner role has been particularly important in concepts of masculinity (O'Connor et al, 2002a). Statements endorsing this and those ignoring it occurred amongst the 14-17 year old boys:

*'With a good job I could provide myself with a home and also provide a family if that's the way my life goes' (Keith, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'My biggest hope is to get my degree and settle down, get a small house in the country and buy a nice jeep. I am planning to manage a football team when I am in my 30s ....Because I would not want a young child to miss the experiences I had with my [football] club' (Stephen, Transition Year, Second Level)*

There were a range of time scales referred to amongst those who referred to ambitions-some simply referring to their school-days: *'My ambition ... is to become a*



*good hard worker in school*' (Kate, *Transition Year, Second Level*); some to a 'social marker' (Morgan 1996) such as their 18th Birthday or when they left school; while others named the time to which the dreams or hopes referred: *'when I grow up'* and included a longer time scale: *'My ambition is ... to be a (filthy rich) lawyer when I grow up'* (Mary, *Fifth Class, First Level*).

Thomson and Holland (2002) noted that the motif of having a home of one's own was an important one amongst the young people in their study. This theme only occasionally emerged in the present study and where it did, it seemed to be linked to a concern with a particular material quality of life style.

*'By the year 2009, ten years time, I hope to be financially free' ....I'd love to live by the beach, and I am determined to have a self -designed beach house and have the freedom to travel where ever I please with my own family (hopefully!).* (Dolores, *Transition Year, Second Level*)

The predominance of a predictable orientation to time amongst the 10-12 year olds and their rather linear life course can be seen indicative of an implicitly male modern perspective. The level of detail in many of these texts –particularly the girls- was striking: with education, travel, paid employment featuring in what could be seen as standardised, mainly linear life courses. It was striking however that relationships/marriage and children were seen as less amenable to planning and featured less saliently in their description of that predictable future.

### **Nature of Temporal Discourses**

Giddens (1991) suggested that the nature of temporal discourses were related to the reflexive project of the self. Thus he suggested that a focus on the life span as a segment of time, unrelated to the life cycle of generations and separate from kinship ties reflected individualisation. In such a context, time became narrower and shallower and related simply to individuals' own projects and plans. In looking at these aspects of young people's discourses, we will focus on first on depth as reflected in its relationship to the life course; to generational positioning; to their sense of themselves as an age cohort and to spatial time (Morgan, 1996). Secondly

we will focus on its breath by looking at the extent to which it moves beyond the individual's own project altogether.

### *Depth of Temporal Discourses*

In this study, almost two thirds (62 per cent) of the young people referred to the future in some way, with little difference between boys and girls (59 per cent versus 65 per cent respectively) or between the younger and the older children (63 per cent versus 59 per cent respectively). Of those who did refer to the future, the most common references, involving roughly half of the total sample, were to dreams/hopes/ambitions/plans for the future (48 per cent) and the most common of these references were to their personal future (61 per cent of those referring to the future doing this).

In terms of the individual life course, time can be structured in terms of birth and death. Just over one in five of these young people (22 per cent) specifically referred to their birth. The 10-12 year olds were marginally more likely to refer to do so than the 14-17 year olds (23 per cent versus 16 per cent), with girls being marginally more likely than boys to do so (24 per cent versus 19 per cent). Sometimes the reference was a purely factual statement referring to their year or date of birth. In other cases such details were woven into a more complex story, with Allatt (1996:135) highlighting the part played by stories about childhood in forming children's identities and contributing to their current feelings about themselves. Such stories also emerged in the qualitative analysis and showed humour and insight as they commented wryly on the impact of a new sibling on their lives and the pressures created by successive births:

*'I started off as a little seed and was then formed in the womb. Then the day finally came I was born a little girl and I was, well they say I was as good as gold. When I was three I learned to walk, run and play. I was a very happy child. Today I'm not that happy because I have a new brother). I have a terrible time. I can't hear the telly because he's shouting. I can't play because he's there talking and I can't go outside without him following me (Laura, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'My birth. It is the year 1989. I am born. My mother is very distressed over the birth because my mother only had my sister one year ago. I am looking forward to the world' (Gerard, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'I was born on [date]. Since then I have grown into what I am today, a mature fun loving teenager not afraid to speak his mind or voice his opinions. The period between these two dates has been my life' (Ronan, Transition Year, Second Level).*

The very nature of a millennium which was the context in which these texts were written implicitly raised questions about an individuals' life span and amongst these young people, there was some awareness of old age: *' I am looking forward to finishing school, getting a job, getting married and growing old during the next Millennium' (Amanda, Fifth Class, First Level)*. However, their own mortality eluded some of the younger children: *'By the time you read this I will be 1012 years old' (Lorraine, Fifth Class, First Level)*.

As outlined in Chapter 1, it was suggested that in a late modern society, a discourse of rootlessness and discontinuity exist (Beck 1992; Bauman 1991 and 1997; Giddens 1991). It seems plausible to suggest that such feelings are likely to be related to the absence of a sense of generational positioning. There were very occasional references to such generational positioning in the present study. Thus for example, Cathriona (Fifth Class, First Level) referred to *'running around on the playing field carrying on the family tradition' [of soccer and football]*. There was evidence of a longer sense of generational continuity in their references to their descendants as possibly reading their texts or carrying on their name:

*'I also hope that I have descendants that carry on my name' (Mark, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'If any of my great, great, great great, great, great, etc etc grandchildren are reading this- Hello' (Julianne, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*[having written that his surname was very unusual] 'Perhaps now it is a more common name because of my descendants' (Tony, Transition Year, Second Level)*

At a broader level, a historical sense of time involves a sense of oneself as part of an age cohort, with distinctive life style and attitudes. Typically in so far as any reference was made to this, their own cohort was juxtaposed with that of the 1960s (possibly because this was their parents' generation): technology, fashion, music and attitudes being amongst the points of difference highlighted in the context of this. Interestingly, a strong sense of disconnection from the institutional structures permeated the

description of the 90s generation below, although references to anarchy, sex, drugs and music could be seen as equally relevant to the 1960s:

*'The 60's were rebellious with flowers in pacifists' hair, the 70's saw Punk and socialism, 80's crap music, U2 and depression, recession. The 90s saw grunge, rap, brit pop before music's eventual downward spiral to inevitable boyband music.... One common theme is threaded through all 90's music and that is "not giving a damn"... about human rights, violations in East Timor, the Homeless, our joke of a political system, the terrible education shoved down our throats' (Joe, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'How glad I am to have lived as a teenager in the 90s, where Anerky, Sex, drugs and music was the only thing on our minds'.. (Jim, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Issues related to time have been seen as related to space-the two dimensions being depicted as effectively inseparable and central to discussions of late modernity and individualisation (Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 1991, 1997; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). There is a widespread popular perception that children's lives to-day in Ireland as elsewhere (see Ennew, 1994; Frones, 1994) are much more institutionalised in the sense that organised activity for children with other children now exists in a wide variety of child oriented activities (summer schools; crèches etc). Morgan (1996: 138) has also been amongst those identifying spatial time as 'the allocation of times in relation to specific spaces or locales'. This kind of scheduling of children's activities in spatially disparate locations means that children are subject to strict time discipline and an accelerated tempo which ensures that, even at a young age, children have the experience of having 'no time' (Buchner, 1990). However, in so far as the experience of 'no time' existed, this seemed to be related to participation in sport (which could not be depicted as new phenomenon):

*'My life is packed to every second. On Monday I don't do anything. On Tuesday I go canoeing with the scouts. On Wednesday I go to scouts and G.A.A. training. On Thursday I go rowing. I have nothing on Friday. On Saturday I have boating and that's sailing, canoeing and rowing on Sunday I have canoeing and I have a football match' (Darren, Fifth Class, First Level).*

The majority of the young people both in both fifth and sixth class in First Level and in Second Level go to school by car or bus (Fahey et al 2005). Thus transport is effectively outside their control. It was striking that although the timing of the start of the school day was broadly similar, young people varied greatly in the time they got up at. This variation could be seen as related to their distance from school as well as

to wider societal patterns related to married women's commuting and participation in paid employment:

*'I start my day when I get up at 7.15. I get dressed for school then I go downstairs to my Mam and Heather my Mam minds her but she comes at 7.00. I then have my breakfast...then I make my lunch....I go over my homework. I brush my hair do my teeth ...and my mam drives me to school'. (Anne, Fifth Class First Level)*

*'Everyday I wake up at 8.45 . Our school starts at half past 9 and it is over at 3 o'clock' (Peggy, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Control is also exercised through the structuring of children's lives including the societal regulation of children's attendance at school, between particular ages and at particular hours ((Devine, 2003; James et al., 1998; Kovarik, 1994). Regardless what time the children got up at, the school timetable dominated their day and extended into the afternoon, with occasional references to homework by those in fifth and sixth class:

*'I get up early and go to school to learn (tortored if you will) for five or six hours then we do our homework, which take an hour or so' (Pad, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'When I am finished my homework I go out and play some hurling' (Eddie, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Amongst those in this study an awareness of the control within the school setting also occasionally emerged-this comment having resonances with some of the views expressed in Devine's (2003) study:

*'Sure, everyone has the right to education, but when we exercise that right we loose our right to speak freely, to equality, we cant even urinate at certain times. Therefore we must set our movements to there timetable and if we are early we must wait in excruciating pain to relieve ourselves' (Damien, Transition Year, Second Level)*

For some of these young people, paid work in the evening and/or at the week -ends was a source of time pressure- albeit that this reflected less the institutionalisation of child oriented activities than the inclusion of young people into adult worlds, on adult terms (see Chapter 3). Some of these young people highlighted the arbitrariness with which age restrictions were enforced in particular social spaces in the adult world:

*'Even though you need to be eighteen to get served alcoholic drinks, most pubs serve sixteen year olds without asking for ID' (Derek, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'at the week-end teenagers chose to go out to nightclubs and to have a great time. Usually alcohol is involved as well as cigarettes but in to-days society it is accepted by most adults' (Aine, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*‘ Sometimes we go to Discos but I’m only 15 so we cant always get in because it is over 18’ (Lou, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Overall, then discourses involving time featured in these accounts at a number of levels. Firstly: as an aspect of their own life course, particularly in terms of their birth, with roughly one in five of these young people referring to their birth. Secondly, it emerged in terms of their generational positioning in a time frame that extended back to their grandparents and forward to succeeding generations. Thirdly, it emerged as a sense of their historical positioning as 90s young people. Fourthly it was reflected in the experience of ‘no time’ and spatial time. There appeared to be little variation by age or gender, although the girls and the younger children were marginally more likely to have a sense of their own life course and generational positioning.

### **Breadth of Temporal Discourse**

In looking at the breadth of these young people’s temporal discourse we were concerned with the extent to which they moved beyond the individual’s own projects and plans to encompass either a wider concern with science and technology or more broadly based humanitarian issues (the latter topic being one that we return to in Chapter 5 in discussing discourses about space).

Science and technology offer the possibility of control within what is seen as an increasingly uncontrollable world. However such references appeared in only a small proportion of texts (seven per cent of those who referred to the future). Given the gendered nature of technology (Wajcman, 1991; McQuillan and Bradley, 1999) references to sophisticated car stereos, to flying cars ‘*that do not pollute the air*’, solar powered cars, electric bikes, robots, going on trips to outer space etc were predominantly made by boys: ‘*I hope someday we will get the technology to go to another Galaxy, or even take people to live on the moon.*’ (John, Fifth Class, First Level).

Irish teenage girls are growing up in families where gender is constructed and reproduced through the organisation of domestic activity in the household- one where

such work is still overwhelmingly done by women with only a minority of men sharing such activity equally (Leonard, 2004b; McGinnity, 2004). Although there was no overt evidence in the texts of a consciousness of ‘the growing disjunction between a gendered reality and a discourse of individual choice’ (Thomson and Holland, 2002:348), there was a suggestion that some of these young people saw technology as a potential solution. Thus for example, Teresa (Transition Year, Second Level) in referring to the future suggested that people expected *‘that the globe would be laden with robots’* and because of these there would be *‘no more cleaning the house or doing homework’* (because this would be done by robots). Similarly young men at Second Level made humorous references to the impact of the technology on social relationships:

*‘So what’s the future like? Do the cars still need wheels? Still got an ozone layer? Are cyborg wives cheap and efficient?’ (Jim, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Interestingly, Teresa (above) goes on to distance herself from what she sees as such self-interested concerns, reflecting a traditional concept of femininity rooted in a denial of the self: *‘My hopes and ambitions ...are not for me, they are for the world we live in now’*. Thus she hopes for a more equal distribution of wealth and an end to violence, re-iterating that: *‘It is my ambition to help in any way I can’*. This raises the issue of the extent to which young women feel ‘entitled’ to focus on themselves in the same way as boys do. Similar perceptions of the lack of such feelings of entitlement to a life of their own, to personal time or spending money emerged in O’Hagan’s (2006) work. They are compatible with the continuance of a construction of identity that equates femininity with serving others, and hence implicitly with invisibility and lack of entitlement (see Leonard, 2004b). It implicitly underlines Thomson and Holland’s (2002:349) observation that ‘far from disappearing, gender is central in providing resources and constraints for imagining the future’.

## **Summary**

In this chapter we have focussed on young people’s discourses about time. Perhaps not surprisingly, since the texts were written as part of the millennium celebrations,

the majority referred to some aspect of the future. Of those who did do so, roughly two thirds referred to a personal future. We looked at these young people's ideas about the future in the context of Brannen and Nilsen's (2002) framework with its focus on living in the present, referring to a contingent future and anticipating a predictable future. Amongst the 14-17 year olds in the present study there was a strong feeling that the future was literally being held at bay. For the girls, fear and anxiety was part of this present orientation, whereas in the case of the boys, the focus was more on pleasure, with both boys and girls wanting to avoid commitments. A contingent model of the future, where the stress was on negotiating that future was also evident, particularly amongst the 14-17 year old girls. It was clear that the girls expected a great deal in terms of education and participation in paid employment (often in the higher professions) and completely ignored possible difficulties as regards reconciling work and family. For them it was relationships that were in the realm of hopes and dreams. The 10-12 year olds, both boys and girls, were most likely to anticipate a predictable future, and to refer to their plans and ambitions in relation to that future- mapping out that future within a standardised, more or less linear life course involving education and paid employment, with (occasional) references to relationships and children as part of that future.

We also looked at the depth and breadth of the young people's temporal discourses. In terms of the former various discourses about time were identified which could be seen as going beyond individualisation and reflecting a sense of time which was rooted in wider social realities including the life course; their own generational positioning: their perception of themselves as part of a 90s cohort, as well as concepts of no time and spatial time. There appeared to be little variation by age or gender, although the girls and the younger children were marginally more likely to have a sense of their own life course and generational positioning. There were occasional insights into the way in which societal patterns could impact on young people's life styles (e.g. a child being dropped off at a carer's home at 7 am, and thus influencing the time schedule of the house). In terms of the breath of young people's temporal discourses, assumptions that the majority of young people see the future in terms of technological



developments were not confirmed by this study, although there was some evidence of broader humanitarian concerns (which will be further explored in Chapter 5).

At least as reflected in these young people's ideas about time, the patterns that emerged are only to some extent typical of late modern society (Bauman 1991; Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Jenks 1996). There are harbingers of the kinds of views one might expect in such a society, particularly reflected in the 14-17 year olds references to living in the present and referring to a contingent future. Such views were reflected in some cases in the shallowness of the time perspective and in the predominant focus on the personal in their ideas about the future. However, amongst the 10-12 year olds, although life plans predominated, the dominant impression is of young people who are highly focused as regards their occupational ambitions, linear in terms of their time perspective and anticipating a predictable and to some extent collectively charted future. It is not clear to what extent such patterns reflect their age or the wider societal context in which they have grown up: one characterised by rapid change albeit within a highly successful economic context.

## **Chapter 5: Discourses about Space**

### **Introduction**

There is a growing interest within sociology in the spatiality of childhood with James et al (1998: 39) suggesting that 'social space is never a merely neutral location.' Giddens (1991:146) argued that in late modernity, the local area declines in importance: place 'becomes thoroughly penetrated by disembedding mechanisms which recombine the local activities into time-space relations of ever widening scope'. Thus in a late modern society characterised by family instability, transpatiality consequent on technological developments, global capitalism and the breakdown in class allegiances, local places it has been argued will have a tangential relevance in young people's lives. Insofar as Ireland is seen as an increasingly globalised society, one might expect the local to have little importance as it becomes 'implicated in various kinds of global connection' (Savage et al, 2005: 204). However, others have argued (Tovey, 2002; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) that the importance of the local is heightened in late modernity. Furthermore it is increasingly recognised that a focus on global processes underestimates variation in the meaning and assimilation of global products within particular cultural contexts and fails to recognise that global cultural products may be used to assert local cultural differences (Bennett, 2000; Paulgaard, 2002; Roth, 2002) especially where the local remains a key element in the construction of meaning and identity. Indeed, it is increasingly recognised that it is simplistic to juxtapose the global and the local (Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Bennett, 2000; Savage et al, 2005). Thus, as will be suggested in Chapter 7 in the context of young people's live styles, there has been a focus on new kinds of connection between the global and the local- including the global being in some way involved in the imaginative construction of the local (Savage et al, 2005). Indeed Beck (2002:1) insisted that 'you cannot even think about globalisation without referring to specific locations and places' while Savage et al (2005:2) recognised the 'the unstable tension' between the global and the local.

In this chapter attention will be focussed on at the spatial discourses as articulated in these texts, focussing particularly on their references to and the meanings of the local and the global. In doing this we will draw not only on quantitative and qualitative analysis of the overall sample, but also at the trends emerging in two random sub-samples (one involving those in Fifth Class in First Level -the 10-12 year olds (n=341) and the other involving those in Transition Year in Second Level- the 14-17 year olds (n=96) where we look not only at the written texts but at the content of the creative drawings on the back page, focussing on their local/global character.

### **References to Local Discourses**

Savage et al (2005:207) suggested that 'residential space is a key arena in which respondents define their social position'. As they saw it 'elective belonging' occurred when people put down roots – when places became 'sites for performing identities' with people linking their biographical life history and their sense of themselves to a particular place (ibid: 29). However, it has also been suggested that that it is useful to see the 'local' not simply as a fixed spatial area but as 'a series of discourses which involve picturing the local and one's relation to it' (Bennett, 2000: 63). Thus, in looking at those elements that were loosely called local, we were particularly concerned with those that indicated a sense of place- broadly defined to include an awareness of some kind of spatial entity, ranging from their room, to their home, village/town, region or nation. In this chapter we look at the meaning of these areas; the young people's evaluation of them; their perception of their own relationship with them as well as the images they use in their drawings which could plausibly be regarded as indicative of a local discourse.

Firstly then, to a degree to which one might not perhaps expect, these texts strongly suggested that these young people located themselves very much in a local area. Thus, two thirds of the total sample (63 per cent) referred to such an area in their texts. As one might expect in view of Lodge and Flynn's finding (2001) that gender differentiated trends as regards space only emerged where space was limited, there was no difference between boys and girls in this respect (64 per cent and 63 per cent

respectively). The younger ones were very much more likely than the 14-17 year olds to refer to their locality (67 per cent of the 10-12 year olds did so as compared with 40 per cent of the 14-17 year olds). This trend arguably reflects the narrower spatial boundaries in the lives of younger children. However, although there were no gender differences amongst the 10-12 year olds, the 14-17 year old boys were marginally more likely than the girls of that age to refer to their own locality (43 per cent versus 38 per cent)- possibly reflecting the differential availability of sports clubs for teenage boys and girls in their local area. Thus, as will be shown in Chapter 7, for many of the young people, but especially the boys, playing for a local team, in football or hurling, reflected and reinforced the importance of the local area. Interestingly, the young people made a clear distinction between such teams and school teams (see also Fahey, 2005) –the latter being implicitly seen as less connected to the local area

*'I play Gaelic Football for Timonae (local area) under 16 and I play right or left full back. For the same team I play hurling as well, I play in Goal Keeper. And I played for the school team' (Tony, Transition Year, Second Level)*

In Chapter 7, it will be shown that girl's football was rapidly increasing in popularity. However although the girls in the present study were conscious of their roles in breaking new ground through this activity, it was striking that they did not differentiate between local teams and school teams. This may well simply reflect the fact that only one such team existed. The net effect appeared to be that, for them, the local area as the basis for such participation appeared to be less salient than it was for the boys.

For many of the young people, feelings about the local area were not restricted to its relevance to such activities. Thus, the 10-12 year olds, particularly those who were at schools in rural areas, had a strong sense of place rooted in local historical material artefacts (such as castles, standing stones etc) validated explicitly or implicitly by tourist interest in such phenomena. Others referred to places where their ancestors had come from or been buried, or historically significant events in the lives of their own community –illustrating what Savage et al (2005:207) referred to a kind of 'contingent tie between themselves and their surrounds'.

However in a context where location was arguably strongly related to their sense of who they were, the meaning of the local area was not restricted to this. Thus, in contrast to the young people in Nairn et al's New Zealand study (2003: 18) who 'did not valorize the rural', the young people in the present study, demonstrated a very striking appreciation of natural beauty in their texts. In the present study such attitudes this did not appear to vary by age or gender. :

*'During the summer holidays me and my mates take the bus up to the lighthouse. The fare is well worth it for the scenery alone. As we reach the Summit, Dublin Bay unfolds in front of us. On a good day with the sun shining the bay lights up. The view is breathtaking' (Rory, Transition Year, Second Level).*  
*'I live in the most beautiful village in Ireland. Beauville is a small village. Whatever part of it you are in you will always see the beautiful sight of greenery circulating you. The high mountains are a great sight.... From the view of St. Kevin's statue you can see the village of Beauville and its outskirts. All in all I think Beauville is a great place to live (Ann, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Tourism is a major source of employment and revenue in Ireland. In some cases the tone of the young people's texts suggested that the physical world had been turned into a commodity or product that 'can be purchased and consumed' (Tovey and Share 2000: 464); a 'commodity to be marketed, packaged and sold to visitors', the product including 'scenic landscapes', a 'green unspoilt environment' that will satisfy their demand for 'the distinctive and extraordinary gaze' (Sheerin, 1998: 39 and 45)- 'the tourist gaze':

*'If you miss Gloriaville, I guarantee you will regret it for the rest of your living days. If you do blink, you will of course, miss the beautiful, picturesque setting of the village, the natural splendour, the majestic scenery from nature and eternal greenery (James, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Of course the possibility that such statements were ironic cannot be excluded, although the context suggested that this was not so. Such cultural commoditisation seemed to be deeply rooted. Thus similar sorts of statements were made by Dublin young people aged 10-16 years in the late 1970s and were seen as reflecting 'a minority culture within the larger Anglo American culture', a response that was depicted as 'a feature of all groups threatened by cultural assimilation' (quoted in Greene, 1994:368). This kind of reference to nature was very different from those who wanted to use nature 'for productive purposes' (Tovey and Share 2000: 464), and who referred to its potential as farming land: '*Land is very wet and soggy and it is*

*very hard for farmers to farm*' (Sean, Fifth Class, First Level). These latter kinds of comments occurred rarely.

In Poole et al's (2002) study, reference to place embraced the natural and the built environment. Similar patterns emerged in the present study. Furthermore, the amenities that were referred to in the texts were not restricted to those specifically for young people. The sheer range of the amenities mentioned was very wide- including leisureplex, cinema, MacDonalds, clothes shops, swimming pools, pitches, fun factories, lakes for fishing and swimming, beaches, as well as post offices, crèches, carnivals, furniture shops, national and international supermarket chains and even a graveyard- these often being combined with references to the natural beauty of the area:

*'We have playgrounds and swimming pools and fun factories and football, tennis, rugby, soccer, gymnastics and I have been in all of them [except] rugby. When you got to a field in the summer when it is sunny you can see a tree in the centre and blossoms everywhere. With flowers everywhere it is a lovely place and nice and clean. Heaven is on earth in Dublin'* (Nicole, Fifth Class, First Level).

*'Lockland is an interesting place with many housing estates, many shops are also to be found here, such as Spar, Superquinn, Crazyprices and Tesco'* (Katie, Fifth Class, First Level).

In contrast to the trends emerging in Morrow's (2002) study of 12-15 year olds, more good than bad features were mentioned, although the older boys were most critical of the perceived absence of facilities for young people (see Nairn et al, 2003). Hanafin et al (2007) also noted that in the Irish studies they looked at, the percentage of children who reported that there were good places in their area to spend their free time was highest amongst the younger children. As in Poole et al's (2002) study, the 10-12 year old girls in the present study were particularly likely to refer to the issue of local cleanliness:

*'Hopetown is not very clean at all. There [is] a lot of writing of names everywhere'* (Aisling, Fifth Class, First Level).

*'I like living in the country but I do hate when people throw litter around and spoil our country side.'* (Jacinta, Fifth Class, First Level)

In Irish sociology and Irish Society, community as a relationship, as well as a place is a strong theme (Tovey and Share 2000). Not surprisingly this was reflected in these

young people's views of their own local village or area. Amongst the 10-12 year olds, the perceived reality of community ties was described in terms of very real social patterns that could be seen as indicative of the child friendliness of the area (such as neighbourhood sports' days, barbeques, visits to Santa etc): *'the residents of Cloon do up a sports day and a B.B.Q. and Santa comes around the houses every year'* (Linda, Fifth Class, First Level). In other cases it seemed to reflect a 'rhetoric of community' and an idealisation of social ties although there was a suggestion amongst the 14-17 year old girls that the social gossip which was part of such community ties was not always appreciated:

*'It is the strong sense of community that makes Haltan the wonderful place it is now and has been down through the ages'* (James, Transition Year, Second Level).

*'The people in my area live for and thrive on gossip.... All this talk is very interesting unless you are the poor unfortunate it's about. To my horror I often had the honour of this pivotal position, which sent me into hiding for a few days for fear of showing my face'* (Aileen, Transition Year, Second Level)

In a late modern society, it has been suggested that young people who are unaccompanied by a responsible adult feel excluded from undifferentiated public spaces since they are seen as potential victims (of traffic, strangers etc) or as potential threats (up to no good, not entitled to be there: Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Mayall, 2002). A similar theme emerged in Devlin's (2006) analysis of themes in the media in Ireland and in other Western Societies. Indeed Devlin's work (2005:181) suggested that there has been an attempt through the media to 'psychologise' and to 'pathologise' young people, a strategy he saw as 'reinforcing the power and status of certain professions, notably the medical/psychiatric and clinical/psychological'. Amongst the young people in the present study there was little evidence of either perception. Rather for the 10-12 year olds, undifferentiated places were seen as offering opportunities for unstructured individual or collective play activities that were not under adult control (Griffiths, 1995; Ennew, 1994; Matthews et al, 2000)- with the theme of freedom to roam the countryside and to play freely on the streets being reminiscent of the descriptions of those raised in the 1940s in the UK (Brannen et al, 2004). The timeless quality of many of these activities was very striking and

potentially surprising in a society that has been depicted as one of the most globalised in the world (Chapter1):

*'I live in the country. It is really peaceful. I love cycling up the road and sit under a tree' (Cathal, First Class, First Level)*

*'Just down the road there is a big heap of mud and it is very high. I like climbing it and sliding down. ....We make bridges out of wood so when we want to walk from one place to another we won't sink.....We play there a lot. (Tracey, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'In the evening me and me friend's would sit on the wall and play cards (Tommy, Fifth Class, First Level)*

As in Corcoran et al's (2003 and 2007) study other than an occasional reference to increased traffic and the need to be careful 'if we don't we could have a bad crash' there was no evidence that the young people felt themselves to be potential victims in these situations. Such attitudes were not peculiar to the younger children. Thus even amongst the 14-17 year olds references to unstructured activity also occurred-some of which evoked a very simple local life style:

*'I live in a small village right beside Lough Tuohy and every summer my friends and I swim there. It has no shops, just the pier, a pub, a guesthouse and approximately 50 resident houses' (Christine, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'I hang around with my friends. We don't do much- but we always have a laugh when we are together' (Ann, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Such patterns also emerged in Corcoran's (2007) study. Similarly Hanafin et al (2007) noted that 87 per cent of the 10-17 year olds in the HBSC study reported that they felt safe in the area where they lived. There were occasional references to the socially problematic character of the area they lived in, indicating that the young people had absorbed this depiction and/or had direct experiences of it in these terms:

*'The area I live in ... has a lot of problems such as drugs, crime and violence. There are a lot of drug abusers in my area. The main drug in our area is probably cannabis, heroin and e... The violence in the area is big also, people do be in different gangs and don't blend with one another. This causes gang fights between people which involves bars, sticks and in some cases guns' (Noel, Transition Year, Second Level)*

For the most part there was no suggestion that these young people perceived themselves as being a threat, although very occasionally the 14-17 year old boys referred to adults perceiving them as troublemakers because of the anti-social activities of a minority (a pattern that was also referred to in Devlin's 2006 study):

*'Well in this day and age being a teenager is a strange part of life with ... people being prejudiced against us simply because of our age and a minority of SCUMBAGS' (Eugene, Transition Year, Second Level).*



Other boys referred to using public secluded areas for illicit activities (e.g. underage drinking or drug taking) although they suggested that the only ones who saw them as not entitled to do so were the police:

*'We get prepared [to go to a disco] by buying drink for that.... We usually buy the drink and go to a secluded area, drink, and then drink more going out on the bus. Sometimes you can be unlucky and be caught by the Guards...(Mick, Transition Year, Second Level).*

Phenomena such as physical aggression and gang related activity is related to a hegemonic concept of masculinity, which is simultaneously valued and seen as socially problematic (Connell, 1995b). There were also occasional indirect references to the social class profile of the area by those who did not 'fit in' (see Poole et al, 2002):

*'Its kind of hard living in Timonea and going to school in Downlea but I manage. Timonea is not all that bad. It is a bit rough but you learn to handle it' (Jane, Transition Year, Second Level).*

Savage et al (2005:208) noted one of the striking and unexpected findings in their study was 'the limited significance of the national frame of reference in people's cultural imaginings'. In the present study as in Bennett's (2000) study, for some young people, the relevant geographical area was much wider than the local area and involved a focus on Ireland. It will be shown in Chapter 6 that a sense of pride in being Irish appears to be a relatively recent phenomenon, fuelled at least in part by economic, artistic and sporting success since the mid 1990s, with the 14-17 year old boys being particularly likely to adopt the role of national cultural interpreter for future generations:

*' In the last decade Ireland has taken the first tentative steps towards becoming a modern cosmopolitan European country. At the root of this transformation has been the Celtic Tiger economy..... This economic boom has a downside however. In recent years crime rates have spiralled while the homeless and impoverished have felt more alienated from mainstream society. However there is much to be positive about... ' (John, Transition Year, Second Level).*

There were occasional references to the status of Northern Ireland, with nationalist hopes and sentiments implicitly underlining these young people's view of who is Irish

*'The top of Ireland belongs to England. When you are reading this Ireland may be one again' (Ann, Fifth Class, First Level).*

There were a small number of cases where a racist ideology was expressed. In contrast to O'Keefe and O'Connor (2002) the expression of such views did not seem to vary between boys and girls, although hopes for an end to racism were more likely to be expressed by girls:

*'Nearly every second person you see now is black. I have nothing against black people but our Government is giving them houses when there is a lot of Irish people who are waiting for a house and the refugees are getting them first' (Lisa, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'The one thing I hate in the world is racism towards black people. I think that they are human beings like us only they are black' (Gina, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Just as in some cases the local was extended to the national, in other cases it contracted to their home. As noted by Savage et al (2005: 156) 'home is that projected, often in idealised ways, on the household relations'. It involves the recognition that the activities in the household have created feelings of 'identity, ownership and belonging' that are reflected in the emotional resonances surrounding the house as a whole, and/or a particular room in it. Indeed Griffin (1985) in her classic study suggested that the importance of bedrooms to adolescent girls reflected the fact that these were one of the few places where they could exert control:

*'My favourite room at home is my bedroom. In my room I keep my roller blades, books, my diary and my clothes. I love to listen to the radio. I hang many posters on the walls' (Sheila, Fifth Class, First Level)*

As previously mentioned, in addition to looking at quantitative references to the local in the overall sample, we also looked at references to it in a sub-sample of written texts, where we also looked at the drawings on the back page to see to what extent and in what ways these reflected local discourses. As in the overall sample, the majority (63 per cent) of the 10-12 year old sub-sample also included local elements in their written texts, as did less than half (44 per cent) of the 14-17 year olds. In the sub-samples, at both ages, boys were more likely than the girls to do this (68 per cent versus 57 per cent amongst the 10-12 year olds; and 55 per cent versus 36 per cent amongst the 14-17 year olds). However such gender differences in the sub-samples need to be treated with caution since in the overall sample there was no gender difference amongst the 10-12 year olds and weaker trends in the 14-17 year olds. Only small minorities of the young people appeared to include local elements in these

drawings on the back page (16% of the 10-12 year olds and six per cent of the 14-17 year olds –with again with no difference between the boys and girls in both sub-samples). This may underestimate the phenomenon since drawings of setting suns or trees in a field or houses without a specific local referent were not defined as local.

In the drawings on the back pages of these written texts the most unambiguous local indicators were local/ national symbols such as Guinness, coins and maps of Ireland, flags and shamrocks, as well as drawings of specific identified places in Ireland, such as Bray Head. Where houses featured in the drawings and where they were labelled as ‘My House’, or had the same number as the young person’s address in the written text, they were seen as referring to their own house and were included as local.

In summary then, it was clear that the local was a very salient element insofar as almost two thirds (63 per cent) of these young people referred to their local area. In the quantitative analysis references to the local varied by age and in some cases by gender. A number of discourses about the local were identified in the qualitative analysis including those related to sporting activities, to local historical material artefacts, to natural beauty, amenities, the opportunities the area presented for unstructured play activities and their perceived socially problematic character. It was also clear that the salient unit for some young people was much wider (i.e. Ireland) with boys being more likely than the girls to refer to this. For others, the salient unit was much more limited i.e. involving their own house and even in some cases their room- the latter being much more likely to be referred to by girls than boys. Finally we referred to the images on the back pages that were identified as local. Overall then, the local rootedness of these young people was striking and in some ways surprising- although the basis for the salience of the local area was clearly very varied.

### **References to Global Discourses**

By the mid 1990s it had become common to see globalisation as involving new forms of connection as technological developments facilitated new kinds of possibilities, both in terms of individual’s own life styles and in terms of the collapsing of global

spatial boundaries. In this section we will look first at references to global concerns, including war and global warming (Gordon and Lahelma, 2002). We will then turn to references to international travel (Rygaard 2003) or to living abroad-whether at an aspirational or experiential level, using these as crude indicators of what Savage et al (2005: 191) has called global reflexivity: ‘their ability to look at their lives, thoughts and values from a perspective that did not take English [in this case Irish] referents as the implicit frame for judgement’. Hence this builds on the references to global elements in their life style (as reflected in their use of the media and their references to international soccer) outlined in Chapter 7.

One of the features of late modern societies is the presence of global environmental risks (Beck, 1992; Beck, 1994). In what Beck (1992:34) has called a ‘risk society’: ‘The center of risk consciousness lies not in the present, but *in the future*’. Such risks are frequently unintended consequences of other kinds of development or the threats of such risks in the future and occur on such a global scale that individual action appears useless. Hence such risks seem likely to generate feelings of powerlessness and existential anxiety as the very basics for survival appear to be at risk (for example, in the case of global warming or the depletion of the ozone layer).

Savage et al (2005:204) noted that in their study of UK adults, ‘When talking about their everyday lives, people do not link their lives to issues of global warming, international relations, or a sense of the world as a arena with a shared identity’. One might expect that young people would be particularly concerned with such issues since the development of a world view can be seen as part of the contemporary challenge of adolescence: ‘young people not only have to consider themselves, their closest environment, and their country in the search for identity, but also have to face questions about how events of a global nature influence them and how they in turn affect the global system by their own behaviour’ (Ojala, 2005: 333). In fact this was not the picture that emerged either in the present study or in Gordon and Lahelma’s work (2002) on young people. More specifically, in the present study only six per cent of those who referred to the future saw it as negative or uncertain (but equally only

eight per cent of those who referred to the future were assessed as seeing it positively). Ojala (2005) suggested that amongst the 17-18 year American high school students she studied, environmental worry was likely to be associated with a low degree of overall well-being in the absence of a number of conditions, including trust in environmental organisations and hope as well as anger in relation to environmental risks. This raises important questions as regards the need to locate environmental awareness in such a context. It was striking that in this study the strongest, most angry and least hopeful comments were made by adolescent boys, with some of them indicating a sense of impotence, global responsibility and a latent sense of despair:

*'The planet as a whole is dying out and it is up to us to save it. When will we learn that what we have now may not be here 20 years down the line for our children and our children's children. Pollution, nuclear waste, war all must be dealt with if we are to have any hope of survival. As it stands the human race is doomed' (Ronan, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'By the next Milenium the world will be a shitty place. Why do I think that?' Well its been getting shittier for the past few year's and I am sure that in another thousand it will be complete and utter bollox we will have destructed ourselves to oblivion' (Robert, Transition Year, Second Level)*

It is possible that such gendered patterns reflect their implicit gendered identification with those men who are seen as responsible for the creation of such problems. In any case, amongst both the 14-17 year old girls, and the 10-12 year old boys and girls, similar but more optimistic views were expressed-with occasional irony:

*'I hope that in the new millennium.. that animals and the environment will be saved.....I hope that pollution will be reduced and a lot more forests planted.....' (Deirdre, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'I would like to see less holes in the ozone layer..... and I wouldnt like to see endangered species go extinct' (Luke, Fifth Class, First Level).*

*'Pollution is rising, forests being ruined. But that doesn't matter, we'll have technology to remind us of what we have lost' (Siobhan, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Other studies have shown that Irish young people have low levels of awareness of global inequality (Lynch and Lodge, 1999). Just over one in five of those in this study who referred to the future referred to hopes for greater equality. Girls in both age groups were more likely to refer to these kinds of hopes:

*'I hope that everybody in the world will have a warm house, a warm bed' (Emma, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'Why is it that one half of the world lives in wealth while the other lives in extreme poverty even though there is enough wealth for the whole world over, if it was shared out evenly' (Mary, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'I hope the new millennium and the new century will be considerably more peaceful than the previous ones. I also hope that through the efforts of aid agencies and Western governments the threat of famine will be eliminated and that developing countries will mature into peaceful, prosperous and democratic nations (John, Transition Year, Second Level).*

Because of the time the data was collected (May, 1999) there was a heightened awareness of issues related to peace, and specifically to the plight of refugees. For the most part such references to refugees were factual. Indeed in some cases their acceptance of them was related to Ireland's history:

*'I hope the kosovo refugees will live a peaceful life. I hope that there will be no more bombing any where' (Linda, Transition Year, Second Level).*

*'Ireland took in 1,000 refugees from Kosovo. Ireland clearly remembers the terrible famine in 1845' (Patrick, Fifth Class, First Level)*

The interweaving of the boys and girls personal futures with wider social issues-whether at the level of individual charity, vocational commitment or more diffuse aspirations was also apparent-sometimes in a touching, humorous way:

*'My ambitions/hopes in life are to get enough points to study medicine, to help people who arent as fortunate as me, try to stop wars, make the peace treaty in Northern Ireland, work and try hard to get rid of things such as racism and to learn sign language (Nicole, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'I had tow other brother's and sister's but day died a long time ago.....I want to Be a Doctor so I will be able to save people's lives and mess wit stethoscopes' (Morgan, Fifth Class, First Level)*

As has been noted in studies of young people in other countries (Brannen et al, 2001; Thomson and Taylor, 2005) aspirational geographical mobility, including dreaming of travelling or migrating to live abroad, was an important feature in these young people's texts. It was striking that, in contrast to, for example, the adults in Savage et al's UK study, such dreams and hopes were not restricted to an English-speaking world or indeed to Europe- although such destinations were particularly common. Thus, references were made to hopes and dreams as regards visits to England, America, Italy and Spain but there were also references to Egypt, etc as well as to extra-terrestrial areas such as Mars: 'I'm hoping to be the first person to walk on Mars' (Chloe, Fifth Class, First Level). Interestingly in view of Savage et al's (2005: 207) suggestion that: 'One's residence is a crucial, possibly the crucial identifier of who you are', there were a number of references by these young people to wanting to live outside Ireland. The specific places they mentioned they would like to live were

mainly in the US (in Orlando; Los Angeles etc) arguably reflecting the dominance of US cultural media such as TV programmes and videos, although there were also references to Europe:

*'When I am older I would like to go to America after college but first travel the world maybe live in Venice or Berlin for a while' (Claire, Fifth Class, First Level).*

*'When I finish school I would love to travel the world....I would like to have a career which consisted of travel to get the opportunity to visit other countries and maybe even live abroad' (Freda, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Only a very small proportion of the young people referred to having actually been born/living outside Ireland at some stage although others referred to holidaying abroad-mainly in parts of Europe or America. Occasionally they compared the two contexts arguably reflecting a kind of global reflexivity (Savage et al, 2005:191) that involved placing their Irish experience in some kind of a comparative perspective.

*'Before I came to Ireland, I use live in New York.....its peaceful and quiet compared to New York. ... I thought I was going to have to learn Irish because everyone here would be talking Irish and I would not understand them. Now I have loads of friends and a good education' (Ciara, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'I was born in London so that makes me English. For most of my life I lived in London. I have a lot more freedom here but I miss London very much'. (Geraldine, Fifth Class, First Level)*

In contrast to girls turning towards the United States, for boys, (see Chapter 7) following international soccer was a key element in their global discourse. In fact however for the most part, the focus was British soccer. Thus, by far the most frequent references (both positive and negative) were made to Manchester United. Such references in some cases explicitly referred to the presence of Roy Keane at that time on the Manchester United team- with many of these implicitly claiming connection to him as an Irishman and a Cork man, and very much a local celebrity (see Chapter 6). There were also references to other British clubs (including Arsenal, Leeds, Liverpool, Celtic, Aston Villa etc). Thus for the most part it is very much an English-speaking world that dominated these young boys' potentially global imagination, although there were a small number of exceptions to this:

*'My favourtie player is Roy Keane, and my favourite team is Manchester United' (Tony, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*"I support Liverpool, Celtic, Real Madrid, Inter Milan, Fiorntina. My favourite players are Michael Owen, Henrick Larson, raul Ronaldo and*

*Gabriel Batistuata. I am totally AMBU (anything but Manchester United)' (Ken, Fifth Class, First Level)*

As will be shown in Chapter 7, global influences, particularly American ones were mediated through the mass media-especially, in the case of girls, through teen drama. It was clear that in some cases the attractiveness of these programmes was related to their global character while in other cases it was related to the local contexts in which they were watched:

*'I would love to be an actress when I grow up. My favourite actress is Sarah Michelle Geller. She stars in Buffy the Vampire Slayer which is one of my favourite programmes' (Tina, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'My favourite TV programme is Friends and Eastenders. I love to snuggle down on the couch and watch them with a bag of crisps' (Ciara, Fifth Class, First Level).*

There was a suggestion that the 14-17 year old girls were particularly likely to enjoy watching such programmes in the company of their own friends- exemplifying the pattern of global cultural resources being consumed in a local context. Savage et al (2005) also suggested that, in their study of UK adults: 'TV was appropriated back to local narratives of identity and belonging, with many people's most extensive comments being about how media use was related to their relational sense of place'.

*'My best friend Mary Looney and I always have out traditional Monday night in watching comedy night. The line up is as follows-70s show, Friends (kick ass) and Veronica's Closet' (Deirdre, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Such patterns illustrate the point that 'you cannot even think about globalisation without referring to specific locations and places' (Beck, 2002:1). Furthermore, these kinds of patterns were not peculiar to this medium- with, for example, the 14-17 year old girls also depicting listening to music even at discos as very much a group experience, enjoyed with their own friends:

*'I love going to discos with my friends you have great fun dancing away to all the latest songs like TLC, Boyzone and other artists that are in the Chart'. (Mary, Transition Year, Second Level)*

In addition to looking at references to the global in the overall sample, we also looked at references to it in a sub-sample of written texts and the drawings on the back pages. The majority of the 10-12 year olds' and 14-17 year olds' written texts in theses sub-samples included global elements (89 per cent and 64 per cent respectively). Boys and



girls were roughly equally likely to include such references in both age groups. Just over a fifth of the 10-12 year olds back pages included global elements (very similar to the proportion that emerged amongst the 14-17 year olds). The most common global elements on the drawings on the back pages of these texts were from the world of global entertainment or consumer culture (such as drawings of international soccer players; dream teams or pop stars) or technological aspects of their own life styles (such as mobile phones, computers, and ghetto blasters)-with characters from films or TV programmes featuring amongst the 10-12 year olds. Drawings of local football events, lists of friends, chat up lines, verses from classical English poems were not regarded as global. There were some drawings that were difficult to classify. Thus, on Dolores' (14-17 year olds) back page there was a drawing of a tight bud of a rose on a stem coming up through barbed wire with the suggestion of what might be a rainbow, a river, and drops of rain in the background. One might suggest that this image suggested beauty despite evil/trouble, the blending of transience (the rose and rainbow) with the permanence of rivers capturing the continuity of life and yet its finiteness. It was not defined as global in the terms defined in this study. Just under a quarter of the back pages in the sub-sample were deemed to have global elements: with boys and girls being roughly equally likely to have such global elements on their back pages. When one excluded the back pages that were blank, the proportion with global elements increased to 44 per cent: with boys being more likely than girls to include global elements on their back pages (53 per cent versus 39 per cent respectively).

Overall then in looking at global discourses it was striking that there was little evidence of risk consciousness as reflected in global concerns although there was some evidence of a broader global consciousness. There was also some evidence of references to international travel and even of a wish to live abroad- both of these predominantly but not exclusively focussing on an English-speaking world. In looking at the global discourses underpinning their references to the media and to international soccer, it was striking that America was the focus of the girls' media

orientation; and England was the predominant focus of the boy's international soccer orientation. The images of such global discourses as illustrated by drawings on the back pages were from the world of global entertainment or consumer culture (such as drawings of international soccer players; dream teams or pop stars) or technological aspects of their own life styles (such as mobile phones, computers, and ghetto blasters)-with characters from films or TV programmes featuring amongst the 10-12 year olds.

### **Summary**

Overall then, it was clear that the local spatial context was important: more than three fifths of the young people locating themselves in the area in which they lived- with the 10-12 year olds being more likely to do this than the 14-17 year olds. Such patterns may be associated with the fact that the 14-17 year olds' texts were more varied in content and structure. There was no gender difference amongst the 10-12 year olds, although the 14-17 year old boys were marginally more likely than the girls of the same age to refer to the local area. It was also clear that the meaning and definition of this site of belonging varied. Thus for some the meaning of the local area lay in its importance as a focus of team based recreation and identity; for others it was historical artefacts or amenities, its natural beauty and/or the opportunities the local area presented for unstructured play activities that were important. Some of the references to the latter by both age groups and sexes evoked a very much simpler life style that surprisingly did not seem to be extinct. Some arguably reflected globalised processes, such as the 'tourist gaze' (Bauman 1997). Others reflected a much more local socio-economic reality- such as the concern with farming production. Although both age groups also referred to the existence and the importance of community ties, although there was a suggestion that 14-17 year old girls were less than enthusiastic about the informal social control exerted through gossip.

For the 14-17 year olds in particular, the relevant geographical area was wider than the local area and in some cases embraced the national. Very occasionally there were references to the local areas' perceived socially problematic character. There was little

evidence that the young people in this study felt themselves to be excluded from undifferentiated public spaces- with both age groups referring to the importance of unstructured activities in these areas. The 14-17 year olds did feel themselves to be excluded from public places (such as discos/nightclubs) that had dedicated purposes because of their age.

Within an Ireland where multiculturalism was beginning to be a reality, there were some evidences of a racist ideology. Finally, the most common local or national symbols in the drawings included drawings of specific identified places in the area, of Guinness, coins, maps of Ireland, identified houses, and very occasionally, flags or shamrocks. Overall then, the picture that emerges, particularly in the written texts, is one of considerable local embeddedness although the nature and source of that embeddedness varied.

However there was also evidence of global elements. The majority of the young peoples' written texts included references to the global entertainment industry and to technology as part of their life styles (see also Chapter 7). In this context it was striking that although the boys' orientation (through international soccer) was predominantly towards the United Kingdom, the girls (through American teen TV) was predominantly towards America. The implications of this difference in orientation are not clear, although it would be interesting to explore this. The global images that were reflected on the back pages largely reflected these life styles and were drawn from the world of global entertainment and consumer culture (such as drawings of international soccer players; dream teams or pop stars) or technological aspects of their own life styles (such as mobile phones, computers, and ghetto blasters)-with characters from films or TV programmes featuring amongst the 10-12 year olds. Perhaps not surprisingly, in view of the more visual character of the global, such images were more common than the local ones.

There was little evidence of risk consciousness as reflected in global concerns about ecological disasters or global warming. In so far as such attitudes existed, they were most likely to occur amongst the 14-17 year old boys where a sense of impotent

global despair particularly as regards environmental issues, although rare, was very striking. Some young people referred to utopian wishes for an improved life for humanity (whether at the level of the environment, greater equality or an end to war). In terms of their own personal future, there was some evidence of a global orientation as reflected in references to wanting to travel and even in some cases to live abroad. In both of these cases their orientation was predominantly towards the English-speaking world.

Overall then the importance of the local suggested that simplistic assumptions that the global had transcended the local were not supported by this study. However, the penetration by global elements and their taken for granted character offered some support for the idea that: ‘in a world characterised by virtual communication, ... social life cannot be seen as firmly located in particular places with clear boundaries’ (Savage et al, 2005:1).

## **Chapter 6: Other Aspects of Narratives of the Self**

### **Introduction**

As previously mentioned, relatively little attention has been paid to the ways in which young people reflexively construct their selves within what is a very rapidly changing society- culturally, socially and economically (i.e. Ireland) where such changes include the practices and definitions surrounding gender roles. The question as to what kinds of biographical narratives young people are constructing in such a societal context is the question underlying this book. Here we are concerned with looking at narratives involving a search for authenticity; a reference to critical moments; a concern with internal emotional states; other references to the body and to role models (Giddens, 1991, 1992 and 1994; Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). We will also look at those modes that seem less reflexive such as reference to positional identities (including age and gender: Bauman, 1997; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) and those where the young people sidestep references to their own identity altogether and provide social commentaries on society.

In exploring such narratives, we focus on the absence/presence of gender differentiated trends, drawing on what Evans (1995: 91) called a 'weak cultural feminist tradition' much of it stimulated by Gilligan's classic (1982) and widely critiqued work (see Stone 1996). This non-essentialist focus on women's difference has been complimented by work on masculinities, particularly hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995b) which has acted 'as a normative and indeed culturally specific standard', 'against which behaviours and identities can be evaluated' (Hearn, 1996: 203). It will be suggested that these modes of reflexivity vary across the life course- with the 14-17 year olds' texts being more likely than the 10-12 year olds to include such reflexivity, although it is not clear to what extent this reflects the importance of life stage or age cohort.

## A Search for Authenticity

For Giddens (1991: 79) 'To be able to act authentically is more than just acting in terms of a self-knowledge that is as valid and full as possible; it means also disentangling .....the true from the false self'. Adolescence is the stage par excellence when the individual makes him/herself the object 'of deliberate attention and sometimes anguished scrutiny' (Berger et al, 1974: 74 see also Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). Such anxious reflexivity was also described by the girls in Gordon and Lahelma's (2002:6). However, in their study, young women at 18 years were able to articulate a disjunction between a gendered and non-gendered discourse: *'Do I want to be a classical sort of woman or do I want to be a human being, or do I want to be something in between.'*

In the present study such accounts were overwhelmingly by 14-17 year olds. The accounts of the 14-17 year old girls in particular included a strikingly self-reflexive element as they wrestled with questions about who they really were, while others explored a developmental concept of self:

*'Lately I've been searching for something that I know I need to find out. Who am I?.. Am I the selfish girl that some see me as? Am I the girl that everyone loves and gets along with? Or am I just another girl... that's fooling herself while walking in the shadows of others? I look in the mirror and I see a teenage girl staring back at me. Somedays I know her. I laugh with her- get along with her. But other days she's a stranger. I stand for ages trying to make sense...I need to know who I am or what I am when will I come to terms with me; myself; the person I really am...' (Pauline, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'I've learned that when you try not to care its just a form of blocking things out. you have to face things as they are' (Kim, Transition Year, Second Level)*

There was some evidence of reflexivity in the boys' texts, although they were much less introspective -arguably reflecting an underlying non-reflective concept of masculinity (Connell, 1995 a and b; Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Thus, David, having begun by apologising that his life was *'not that interesting. Well what could I put down about my life? I am only 16'*, then shied away from such reflections although he half reverted to it again at the end of the text:

*'How can I put my life, my personality and my ideas down in a few lines? Oh just think of me as this. I am the best and I am great and wonderful.'*

There is a suggestion that this withdrawal from reflexivity reflected a fragile sense of his own value, 'alternating between a grandiose and a worthless sense of self'

(Sennett, 1977:21) –the latter being reflected in hostility towards those defined as ‘other’: *racists and fascists...junkies and the rest of the filth that pollute our city*’ (David, *Transition Year, Second Level*).

Overall then a search for authenticity was not evident in the 10-12 year olds’ texts; and amongst the 14-17 year olds, it was more evident in the girls’ than in the boys’ texts. Such gendered trends seem to contradict the theorists of late modernity, although they are compatible with views expressed by Giddens (1991), Lash (1994) and Bjerrum Nielsen (2004b) that since girls’ cultural value is more ambiguous, they are more likely to engage in such reflections.

### **Critical Moments**

Giddens (1991) suggested that in late modernity, moral crises relating to basic aspects of the life experience, such as sickness and death are ‘sequestered’ or separated out from the routines of everyday life. At ‘critical moments’ (e.g parents splitting up, death, moving house etc: Thomson et al, 2002) routines are disrupted and there is a ‘return of the repressed’ (Giddens, 1991: 202/03). It is suggested that gender is one of the repressed frameworks which is activated at that time- and that hence a focus on such moments enables us to see such frameworks. Amongst the 14-17 year old girls in this study, deaths and musicals/dramatic productions were particularly likely to be seen as such critical moments. For the boys of that age, although deaths were also critical moments, the most vivid references were related to attempted hierarchical dominance (particularly reflected in references to football).

Death raised issues about connectedness. In an increasingly hedonistic, individualistic, competitive, materialistic society, this has become the remaining taboo (Mellor and Shilling, 1993). In this study, the intensity of the girls’ references to death was striking:

*‘Death is a scary issue which sometimes I don’t like to deal with but it’s the only certainty in life so its important... Most recently my best friends Dad died and another friend, Ann, her best friend died. These were real eye openers and they were reality. I find myself numb to feeling now’* (Deirdre, *Transitional Year, Second Level*).

Similarly, Claire (Transition Year, Second Level) who lost her father at age four years, describes this as *'the saddest thing that ever happened to me'*; while for a girl who had experienced multiple family losses:

*'I felt like I lost a part of myself, but I kept going, what else can you do. I am the kind of person who always puts on a brave face but underneath I cry with pain' (Anita, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Her family, and boyfriend are very important now *'But I never let them know how important as I am afraid of losing more people close to me'*. The same kind of issues surrounding the anticipated attenuation of ties with school colleagues were also reflected in the girls' texts, albeit less intensely:

*'The one thing I hate about the year is the class will all split up' (Elaine, Transition Year, Second Level).*

Death was also identified as a critical moment in the 14-17 year old boys' texts, albeit their references to it were more terse: *'I realised recently, with the death of a close friend, how much ill-health affects us' (Paul, Transition Year, Second Level).* Marriage break up could be seen as a similar kind of life event. Hogan et al (2003) found that, amongst the 8-12 year old children they interviewed, there was a good deal of continuity in their family and school experiences, with the majority feeling that the separation had benefited all family members, and with ongoing commitment by both parents to the children being seen as particularly important. It was striking that marriage break up was seen as very much less transformative than death: although there were occasional terse references by the boys- implicitly suggesting that they had not come to terms with their loss (Bowlby, 1980):

*'My grandad...made me realise that my parents still loved me the same as ever and didn't have to live together to prove that to me'. (Helen, Transition Year, Second Level).*

*'I was four when my Dad moved out, now I do not really remember him so it doesn't bother me' (Jim, Transition Year, Second Level)'*

At a very different level, school musicals were widely referred to by the girls, as critical moments involving personal transformation where connectedness was recognised and strengthened. Thus, as Veronica went backstage to prepare for the opening night of the School Musical, in which she had a leading role:

*'my heart started thumping against my chest, the rush of adrenaline filled my body I felt a lump in my throat then suddenly tears in my eyes....My friends.... talked to me, made me laugh, helped me through the nervous situation I was in*



*....it was like something had come over me, something strange, something great...the audience clapped and clapped, I felt so proud, so happy ...I felt brilliant ...it was the best night of my whole life but I wouldn't have done it without my friends there to calm me down'.*

This experience not only transformed her idea of herself, but it also reinforced the importance of relationships and their contribution to her well-being. It was striking that even when the same events were referred to by boys, they were less likely to refer to their identity transforming aspects: simply saying for example, that such events had made the year: *'the best year yet'* -a pattern that may however simply reflect their ability to express such feelings.

Amongst the 10-12 year olds, insofar as critical moments were referred to, they also seemed to revolve around issues related to connectedness, albeit other elements were included. Jenny's text was an example of a girls' narrative of this type but one that focused on a different type of 'critical moment' (Thomson et al 2002): the birth of her twin brothers –a moment of potential marginalisation (when she went to stay with her aunt) that she converted into one of female power reflected in naming them. The key element in the narrative is that although her mother mentioned names for the twins, Jenny chose two different names and they were the names they became known by:

*'I insisted on calling them Donal and Garry and til this day their names are Donal and Garry.... They are five now....and sometimes they annoy me, but that day triumphs over everything. And that day was the Happiest Day Ever'.*

Implicit in this are the perceived existence of control over her mother and/or the recognition of her position in the family in a context which could have had resonances of displacement. Such texts were however unusual amongst this age group - although they can be seen as reflecting typical gendered themes of connectedness.

Amongst the 14-17 year old boys', critical moments tended to affirm their categorical identity as a man. The themes emerging were reminiscent of Willis' Lads (1977) and Mac an Ghiall's (1994) Macho Lads with 'masculine narratives of remembering' involving football matches, which expressed and affirmed a male collective identity being involved in the 'reproduction of conventional gender identities and definitions' (Willis, 1990: 115). Indeed Connell (2005: 15) suggested that: 'The body practice that is almost as important as sexuality, as a site of masculine formation is sport'-

especially competitive organised team sports; the former ‘ritualised combat being presented as ‘a site of masculine camaraderie, a source of identity, an arena of competition for prestige, and a possible career’. In the text below, the language around football is emotionally intense- culminating in the repetition of the word ‘heartbreaking’. Identification with the Irish soccer team (reflected in ‘we’) is explicit and the memory of it and the vicissitudes of a county match (involving Kildare) dominate this young man’s account:

*‘both World cups 1990 and 1994 had some of the happiest and saddest days of my life. When we bet Italy in 1994 [it] was unreal, but then to lose to Holland two weeks later was heartbreaking. But the moment in my life up to know was when Kildare won the Leinster final..... for the first time in 50 years. The celebrations went on for weeks... Kildare.. lost in the final to Galway and that was heartbreaking. Nothing much else has happened in my life since. I am content with life and that’s enough’ (Tom, Transition Year, Second Level)*

These are, as he sees it the key events in his life- one which he describes as a contented one. Football is a crucial site for the construction of masculinity in his life: with competition in an all male context being seen as inevitable; success, exhilarating; defeat emotionally exhausting, but the reinforcement of a gendered identity through the activity being the ultimate validation so that it is ‘enough’ even if the outcome involves failure/defeat. Similar references to football were found in the 10-12 year old boys’ texts, although here they were linked with issues related to connectedness. Thus John’s text focussed entirely on one day that he saw as highly significant -his first day ‘toggling out’ when he was 10 years old, in the hope of being chosen to play on a local soccer team. The group involved thirty others, only one of whom he knew. There is an unusually reflective tone in the text as he recalls that: *‘I felt so nervous, so insignificant’*-appearing not to have internalised the idea that disclosing emotional vulnerability is incompatible with hegemonic masculinity (Cleary, 2005). He began to relax when one of the strangers slapped him on the back, and introduced him to the others *‘To his surprise’* he was chosen to play midfield and scored the winning goal :

*‘And my most glorious moment was when I scored the winning goal for my team. It was tough but at last we got to the semi-final against our old rivals’ [They were subsequently beaten] ‘As the final whistle blew we walked off the pitch disappointed. That was the last game of the season but I was already looking forward to the next season’*

A focus on critical moments suggests that connectedness remains an important way of ‘doing girl’ while struggling for hierarchical dominance through football and fighting

remains an important way of 'doing boy'. Thus issues around connectedness were also referred to by the boys, although, particularly amongst the 14-17 year old boys, they were much more terse, suggesting that they were less compatible with their normative discourse about 'doing boy'. Boundary crossing was also evident amongst the 10-12 year olds- with Jenny, although focusing mainly on connectedness also implicitly referring to power; and John, although referring mainly to hierarchical dominance through sport also referring to acceptance and hence connectedness.

### **Internal Emotional States**

Giddens (1991) suggested that the self-interrogation that is part of reflexivity involves questions around how one is feeling at any moment in time. Indeed Beck (1992) suggested that the very process of releasing people from traditional ascribed roles, generated a preoccupation with the minutiae of the self. In a late modern world there is frequently an implicit suggestion that such internal emotional states are likely to be characterised by feelings of dislocation and unhappiness. Similarly, for Giddens (1991:9) 'Personal meaninglessness- the feeling that life has nothing worthwhile to offer- becomes a fundamental psychic problem in the circumstances of late modernity'.

Hanafin et al (2007) noted that 90 per cent of the 10-17 year olds in the HBSC survey reported that they were happy with their lives-with the 10-11 year old girls being most likely to say this and the 15-17 year old boys being least likely to do so. It was striking that many of the young people in this study also referred to their own emotional states. For the most part such references were to positive emotional states – with the sources of such feelings involving family, friends and the wider social context. Such references occurred amongst both age groups and amongst both boys and girls. The simplicity of these positive statements was very striking.

*'I love my friends. I love my family. I love being on stage performing for others, honestly -I love school. I really love my life' (Aida, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'I live a great life, no disappointments or anything like them. My family's great so are my friends. Again I love my life' (Steve, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'I have a happy life. I love my family, my dog, my friends and school' (Laura Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'I think I have a really good life' (Colin, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'As I look back on my life I realise that it was great. I am now eleven years old and enjoying life' (Mary, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Such trends are compatible with the high scores on the life satisfaction index that emerged in an international quality of life study, where Ireland ranked first (Economist.Com, 2005). However, some young people in the present study were less enthusiastic: describing their lives as *'pretty boring'* (Mike, Fifth Class, First Level); and others being apprehensive about leaving school and making decisions about their future life (see Chapter 4). For others, what was disturbing was the recognition that happy lives were not guaranteed-that pregnancy and drug use could disrupt the lives of people just like themselves and the 'scary' recognition that this could also happen to them:

*'Kids I know are getting pregnant, leaving school and sucked into drugs. Its actually scary because we all grew up in the same area, the same friends, the same environment as these people but we all turn out different..The world is a lot bigger to me now and a lot scarier...'. (Deirdre, Transition Year, Second Level)*

There were a very small number of young people whose texts suggested worrying levels of unhappiness. In some cases this was linked to their experience of cumulative losses, while in other cases it was implicitly linked with difficulties in changing schools, or not fitting in:

*'I have just moved schools and I hate my life. The school in Oldplace is ok but there are some wankers in there.'* (Tony, Transition Year, Second Level)

For Joe, feelings of 'not quite fitting in' were reflected in and reinforced by his decision to do Transition Year (an optional choice in some schools). He was at pains to stress that this decision in no way reflected academic weakness but that he simply wanted a break from studying, although it had the unforeseen consequence of setting him apart culturally and socially:

*'Unfortunately none of my good friends decided to do this...There are times when I am discontented with my life... 'Perhaps this is largely due to my seeming inability to either be part of 'the gang' or to find a girlfriend'.*

However, he went on to deny such feelings by affirming that *'overall'* he has a good life; that he has *'parents and relatives who care for me, and brothers who I care for, and most importantly I have my friends'*. In summary then references to internal

emotional states occurred amongst both boys and girls and at both ages, and for the most part were positive although there were a minority whose experience of life was bleak. These latter references were most likely to be made by the 14-17 year old boys.

### **Other references to the Body**

Giddens (1991:77) suggested that ‘the reflexivity of the self *extends to the body*’ (italics in original) and included the ‘conscious monitoring of sensory input from the environment as well as the major bodily organs and body dispositions as a whole’. The body of course also has an outward corporeality. The aspects of it that seemed likely to have particular significance for children were height, shape, appearance and performance: ‘The body in childhood is a crucial resource for making and breaking identity precisely because of its unstable materiality’ (James et al, 1998:156). The body can also be as an object of adornment. Indeed Donoghue (2005:234) suggested that ‘the presentation of the physical self, including.. dress, posture, gait and other behavioural mannerisms and bodily movement’ were implicated in the construction of masculinity, while Jagger (2002:55) suggested that there were now similarities in the men and women’s references to their bodies; and that both ‘have donned the trappings of femininity in their leisure and work’.

Given the ages of these young people not only are their bodies changing, but the institutional contexts in which meanings are given to these bodies are also changing. Thus for example at the end of First Level, children may come to see themselves as big, partly by comparison with the smaller children in the school, and partly because of their impending transition to Second Level. Once they make that transition however they are catapulted into being small again. Rather surprisingly then, in the present study there were few references to physical appearance, and those that occurred were mainly by the younger children:

*‘ I am almost 5 foot tall and I weigh around 7 stone (45-55kg). I am twelve years old’ (Morgan, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*‘I am 6 ½ stone and I am 4ft 12 inches’ (Sandra, Fifth Class, First Level)*

There was some suggestion that references to height in implicitly relative terms (e.g. being tall for their age) were particularly likely to occur amongst children in Special

Schools or classes-such references arguably reflecting the fact that these could be seen as ways in which they outperformed their age cohort. Insofar as physical appearance was referred to, the most common direct references were to hair or eye colour. The stereotypical definition of female beauty is blond hair and blue eyes with Clark (1998) suggesting that references to hair colour, as blonde in Western society was a coded reference to sexual attractiveness/ availability. References to this kind of colouring occurred amongst both boys and girls:

*'I have blue eyes and fair hair' (Julie, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'I have blond hair and blue eyes' (Oliver, Fifth Clas, First Level)*

Occasionally, references to appearance were tied in to references to family similarity. However there was also some suggestion that felt deviation from implicit norms was associated with references to appearance:

*'People always say I look the Image of my Mam. I have Brown hair Green eyes' (Anna, Fifth Class First level)*

*'I have red hair green eyes I am also small which is not fun. I also have freckles on my face' (Karen, Fifth Class First Level)*

*'I wear glasses.. I have white hair. When I walk by people on the street look at me' (Brian, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Clothes 'as a means of symbolic display, a way of giving external form to the narrative of self-identity' (Giddens, 1991:62) have been widely depicted as ways through which young people construct their identities in a post modern society characterised by a weakening of collective identities (Frost, 2003; Miles, 2000; Miles et al, 1998; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Raby, 2002). In this study references to clothes were much more common. In this as in other studies (such as Miles, 2000; Miles et al, 1998; Mac an Ghiall, 1994; Frosh et al, 2002) such references were made by boys as well as girls, with occasional explicit rejection by girls of stereotypically 'feminine' clothes such as dresses:

*'I like clothes as well. My favourite brands are addidas, nike and fila' (Frank, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'I like sports clothes. I don't like dresses' ( Ciara, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Furlong and Cartmel (1997: 62) noted that: 'youth styles can often be seen as highlighting similarity rather than difference- 'street cred' coming from conforming to dominant fashions. Identifying what is appropriate in a particular group is an informal learning experience (Frost, 2003). Thus Sean noted that he did not have much 'dress

sense' but that a cousin who *'got me a bit wise on the dress scene'*. Others stressed that they were *'typical adolescents'* their favourite clothes, being *'similar to the rest of my class'* (Paula, *Transition Year, Second Level*). There were occasional suggestions that pressures to conform were oppressive and there were also references to ignoring fashion trends altogether, although it is arguable that: *'The man who consciously pays no heed to fashion accepts its forms'* (Simmel, 1957/1904:307):

*'In today's world every person's minds are taken up by fashions and what other persons think of you'* (Mark, *Transition Year, Second Level*)

*'I consider myself an individual. I wear what I like not what is in fashion. If it happens to be fashionable, so much the better'* (Ann, *Transition Year, Second Level*).

There were also references to varying fashion styles amongst the young people-a pattern that has been widely seen as signalling different kinds of identities (Frost, 2003; Shildrick, 2002; Miles, 2000):

*'The monotony of uniforms in severely contrasted to the individualism that most people like to portray through their style. Some wear all black, with knee length boots, some like the more slinky revealing attire, I like a sophisticated casual look with simple but elegant clothes'* (Catherine, *Transition Year, Second Level*)  
*Fifth Class, First Level*)

*'My favourite type of clothes would be Combats; String tops, Flares, Platforms and big chunky runners'* (Joyce, *Fifth Class, First Level*)

In contrast to the range of references in both age groups to clothes, there were few references to external performance- whether in the academic area or in the area of recreational activities- such references as there were being mostly made by the 10-12 year olds and referring to being good at sports or specific school subjects:

*'I am good at hurling and football'* (John, *Fifth Class, First Level*)

*'My favourite subject is maths because I always get the answers right and I am good at maths'* (Laura, *Fifth Class First level*).

Overall, there were relatively few references to aspects of embodied selves, apart from references to clothes. The scarcity of such references is surprising; particularly insofar a focus on the body is one of the primary adolescent preoccupations. This may reflect the fact that these texts were written in a school context; and/or that for these young people, the body is related to a sexual discourse.

## Identification of Role Models

In a context where the self is a reflexive project for which the individual is responsible and where: 'We are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves' (Giddens, 1991:75) it make sense to refer to role models- people whom we aspire to be like or who implicitly suggest ways to 'make' ourselves. Kuhling and Keohane (2002) have drawn attention to Durkheim's suggestion that every society constructs an ideal type member who embodies and represents the societal values, and who is the model for members of that society. They suggested that whereas in traditional societies role models were heroes who fought on others behalf; in liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000) the hero was replaced by the celebrity who was admired because he/she fought for him/herself. Furthermore, Kuhling and Keohane (2000:110) suggested that the 'ambivalence between modern individualism and traditional community' was reconciled in the Irish hero or celebrity 'who is presented simultaneously as a unique individual and as 'one of our own'.

Less than one in five (17 per cent) of the young people specifically identified role models- with these being more likely to be identified by the 10-12 than the 14-17 year olds. The majority (60 per cent) of these were public figures drawn from the world of politics, business, the media, pop stars and sport; just over a quarter being parents, friends or other family members and the remainder a combination of both. In identifying public figures as role models it was striking that either explicitly or implicitly, some of the young people referred to heroes in the sense of people who were admired because they fought on others' behalf. Such heroic role models included historical and contemporary national and international figures:

*'I have many hero's they would be James Connolly died in 1916, Bobby Sands died on hunger strick in 1981 ....' (Joe, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'Martin Luther King is one of my role models because he wanted freedom for black and white man' (Andy, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'My Role models are John Hume and David Trimble for fighting for World peace' (Ann, Fifth Class, First Level)*

As suggested by Kuhling and Keohane in some cases it was clear that what was valued was that person's ability to remain 'ordinary':

*'My hero is the President of Ireland as she has so much power and doesn't let it go straight to her head' (Shauna, Fifth Class, First Level)*



In other cases it was clear that the key element was that these were celebrities- people who had been individually successful - whether in financial, artistic or sporting terms. Amongst the boys, the public figures that were identified as role models were particularly likely to include international and national footballers and national hurlers from their own local area -exemplifying Kuhling and Keohane 2002 suggestion that in Ireland celebrities' local links are important. Occasionally, (as in Celia's comment below) there was a kind of wry reflexivity about celebrities as role models:

*'My role model for my life would probably be Bill Gates (owner of Microsoft also one of the richest men in the world)' (John, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'My role model would be Alex Ferguson who is the manager of Manchester United' (Tim, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'Role models these days are people like Geri Halliwell (former Spice Girl) .....Actually most children want to be Pop stars and hardly any want to be scientists or doctors. Who am I to complain? I want to be a pop star myself!' (Chloe, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Feminine adolescence has been seen as a paradox in Western Society: adolescence being associated with rebelliousness and independence, with femininity associated with nurturance. However Kearney's (1998) study of 'riot grrrls' challenged the latter views although Skeggs (1997) and Lynch and Lodge (2002:130) suggested that 'to overtly challenge sexism is to... become 'unfeminine'. In this context it was striking that despite the explicit reference to the perceived empowering aspect of the Spice Girls as regards increasing girls' occupational choices and challenging domesticity as destiny, there was a clear distancing from the identity of 'hard hitting feminist'. Similar trends have been documented by Skeggs (1997) who has seen them as using feminist frameworks as explanatory, while avoiding the cultural costs inherent in identification as feminist.

*'Love them or hate them, the Spice Girls have done something to open peoples eyes to the strength of the female gender... because they are giving a message that if you are female you don't have to make dinner every night and you can go out and make a life for yourself as a president or a successful businesswoman as well as being a loving mother. If we grow up learning these things now, we can do what so many women for years have wanted to do - have a life outside the home... I don't mean to be a hard hitting feminist. I just want to show that women can do as well as men. And that it is not your gender which plots your success. Just your strength of mind and hard work" (Ann, Transition Year, Second Level)*

A small group of these young people identified those in their own social milieu as role models. In some cases (particularly where the role model was female) it was personal qualities that were the basis for their identification, such as being good to talk to (with a mother giving up her paid work for her child being seen as a personal sacrifice, although at a certain stage it could potentially reflect the existence of the Marriage Bar):

*'My role model would be my mother because she coped with my father's death and minds my sister and I.'* (Bryan, Fifth Class, First Level)

*'My role model is my mum [who is] cool kind sweet and gave up her job for me'* (Fiona, Fifth Class, First Level)

When girls referred to grand-parents or other figures in their own social milieu as role models, they also frequently included references to their personal qualities- with cross gender identification being implicitly depicted as unproblematic:

*'I'd like to be like my grandfather.....loving, caring, happy, kind, understanding, hard worker and always willing to lend a hand to anyone'* (Nicola, Transition Year, Second Level)

*'I think my role model would be my teacher Mrs. Hally because I would like to be a teacher when I finish schools and be kind and generous like her'* (Lisa, Fifth Class, First Level)

Jagger (2002) noted that in her study more than half of the men combined references to occupational, educational and economic status with references to energy and virility and appearance. Amongst these young people, in referring to their father as a role model, it was still the positional or performance elements that dominated, although these were wider than those related to their socio-economic position. Thus, where a father was identified as a role model, these young people typically referred to the position he occupied or his skills in sporting or other arenas-girls identification with their fathers being on a similar basis to boys:

*'My Dad's a great role model. He's involved in the Gaelic he's a secretary for the minor board'.* (John, Fifth Class, First Level)

*'My role models are ...my dad because he won the world championships at karate'* (Jennifer, Fifth Class, First Level)

*'My role model would be my dad because without my dad we would not have as much money .. because my mum does not work'* (Claire, Fifth Class, First Level)

Overall then, only a minority of the young people identified role models- with the 10-12 year olds being most likely to do so. Their role models included those described as heroes, who were chosen for working on others' behalf, as well as celebrities who

were chosen because of their possessions, fame or success. There was some suggestion that women were more likely to be chosen for personal qualities. Furthermore there was also evidence of cross gender identification- by the girls, underlining the idea that gender was not a salient basis for their identification.

### **Absence of Reflexivity? Positional Identities**

Cultures have traditionally provided individuals with a set of social categories that they can use to classify themselves (Goffman, 1968; Turner 1987). It has been argued that in a post-modern society, there is a weakening of such collective identities (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). Giddens (1991:106) suggested that 'in a masculinist culture' to avail of those opportunities that did exist 'women have to abandon their older 'fixed' identities in a more thorough going way than men' (ibid: p 106). In this section we will focus particularly on references to age, gender, nationality and class and suggest that the inclusion of such references reflect social embeddedness and can be seen as non-reflexive.

Williams (2000:119) noted there 'was no general solution to the problem of which membership categorisation device should be selected to identify an individual when at least more than one would be a correct description'. However, Sacks (1992) suggested that 'situational relevance' could be shown to play a part in the selection. Because these young people's texts were written in school, the most salient identities in that context were the ones most likely to be referred to. Age is widely used as a descriptor in the school setting. The young people in this study almost universally referred it to. For the most part it was one of the first statements written: *'I am 12 years old'*; *'I am sixteen years old'*. Occasionally it was woven into a story:

*'My actual life began 16 ½ years ago when my 9 months pregnant mother started to wonder why she was getting tummy pains and walked through the snow for ½ hour to get to hospital. It was a week before Christmas'. (Eileen, Transition Year, Second Level).*

Thus even in a society that is undergoing rapid change, non-reflexive identities that are situationally salient seem to persist.

One might expect that references to gender would also occur, given the importance of biological gender processes at this stage. Indeed Black and Coward (1998:118) argued that women are always defined by their gender, whereas: ‘what is available to them [men] is a discourse where gender and sexual identity appears to be absent. It is precisely this refusal to recognise the effects of masculinity that constitutes a problem for women.’ They suggest that the way to tackle the asymmetry is not to de-gender women but to en-gender men. A lack of gender awareness has been widely documented (Lynch and Lodge 2002; O’Connor et al, 2002a) and schools, despite purporting to be gender neutral, have been shown to be involved in the reproduction of gendered subjectivities (Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Mac an Ghiall, 1994). In this study, gender as a positional identity was only occasionally explicitly adverted to: something that may reflect either its unimportance or its taken for granted quality. Occasional references were made by the younger children to gender in the context of age itself and/or in the context of a wider life narrative:

*‘I am an eleven year old boy’ (Tom, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*‘I’m a freckle faced dynamic, chatty and sporty girl’ (Mary, Fifth Grade, First Level)*

*‘My life story. My name is Lorraine....I started off as a little seed and was then formed in the womb. Then the day finally came . I was born a little girl and I was, well they say I was as good as gold (Lorraine, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Such references were also sometimes linked with references to the same sex parent by the 10-12 year old children: *‘My dad and I are the only boys in the family’*; *‘I am the only girl in my family except for my mam.’* Gender was also occasionally recognised by the younger boys and girls as an attribute of their classmates: *‘All the boys in my class are my friends’*. Such references occurred even more rarely amongst the 14-17 girls in the context of a reflexive search for authenticity (see earlier section), although they were rare amongst the 14-17 year old boys: *‘The main point is I’m a human being....’ (Bernard, Transition Year, Second Level)*. There was also a suggestion that references to gendered identity in a school context were seen as referring to a sexual discourse: *‘Boys, boys, boys, that is all on my mind’ (Sinead, Transition Year, Second Level)*. Sexuality, and particularly homosexuality was a hidden discourse in the texts (see also Lynch 1999).

Up to the 1990s the absence of a sense of pride in being Irish had become almost a taken for granted reality: a kind of national lack of self esteem and consequent begrudgery of any individual success being popularly seen as a correlate of being Irish. The success of Irish pop and rock artists, and of the Irish soccer team in international competitions in the 1990s has played an important role in transforming such attitudes:

*'Even the Irish soccer team managed by Mick Mc Carthy is considered one of the best in Europe. We are even considered one of the twentieth century's greatest countries as far as literature is concerned with writers like James Joyce' (Vincent, Transition Year, Second Level)*

More recently a sense of national identity has been publicly reclaimed by the State: the association of the national flag with the Irish Republican Army and the armed struggle in the North of Ireland prompting a widespread ignoring of issues related to national identity. In the present study references to national identity were most likely to be made by boys-particularly but not exclusively by those whose Irish identity was felt to be in some way partial (e.g. they were born in the UK of Irish parents or with one non-Irish parent). In other cases a sense of national identity was reflected in a valuing of cultural aspects of an Irish life style- including Irish language and music:

*'I am half Irish and half Argentinian' (Paddy, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'I am very proud to be Irish and love my country which I hope will remain as beautiful as it is today for the next generation to enjoy' (Albert, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'Irish people speak English but our native language is Irish' (Ann, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Thus although there were some direct and indirect references to national identity- such references were not common.

Ireland remains at least nominally a country where the overwhelming majority of the adult population return their main identity as Catholic in the Census, and where the educational systems at first and second level are denominational. Catholicism has been increasingly under pressure in the face of scandals involving child sexual abuse since the mid 1990s (reflected in an overall drop of 33 per cent in weekly mass attendance over a ten year period: Hornsby Smith and Whelan, 1994 and IMS Millward Brown, 2002). There were very occasional strong references to a Christian identity. There were no similar strong references to a Catholic identity and there was

evidence of occasional strong negative statements featuring Roman Catholicism amongst the 14-17 year olds:

*'I am a Christian and my life is devoted to God. ...Some of my friends live their lives for the weekends, when they can go out, get drunk and do all that comes with it, weither because of their own hurt or simply the power of peer pressure. From where I'm standing its easy to see the pain and confusion they are in. But I can confidently say I know life in all its fullness because I belong to Christ Jesus' (Betty, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'... the catholic church... has far too much influence on our lives in this country. There aren't enough non-catholic schools and catholic views are being hammered into the minds of children from 4 years old onwards until they are too scared to believe anything else, in the majority of primary schools all over the country' (Louise, Transition Year, Second Level)*

In Lynch and Lodge's (2002) study, young people were aware of class differences but were too embarrassed to talk about them; referring to them euphemistically or individualising a class discourse by referring to a particular individual's status ('snob', 'scumbag' or 'knacker'). In the texts in this study, there was a similar silence surrounding class identity. There were occasional references to social distancing from those who were seen as lower in status: *'We used to hang around with fellas but some of them were skumbags' (Deirdre, Transition Year, Second Level)*. There was also evidence of what has been called a patronising sympathy for those who were 'less fortunate' (O'Keefe and O'Connor, 2001). Thus, having said that she goes to a 'private school' Ann (*Fifth Grade, First Level*) says that *'You may think that everyone is as well off as me. Well I wish that was the case.'*

Overall then other than age, which was almost universally referred to, arguably reflecting the fact that it had 'situational relevance' (Sacks, 1992) other references to non-reflexive positional identities rarely occurred amongst these young people. Gender was rarely referred to: reflecting its (perceived) situational irrelevance in school, its taken-for-granted character or its perceived relationship to a sexual discourse. There was some suggestion that national identity, insofar as it was important at all, was referred to by boys. Within an Irish context, in what is still a predominantly white society, there were few references to race; with class and sexuality being hidden discourses. To a degree to which we have not fully recognised

some of the difficulties surrounding adolescence in Irish society may arise from what appears to be the relatively sudden decrease in the importance of positional elements.

### **Absence of Reflexivity? Social Commentary**

Up to now the texts have been concerned with personal lived experiences (Edwards and Ribbens, 1998). However Frisch (1998: 36) noted that those who survived the American Depression were likely to elevate 'personal and biographical generalisation into historical terms'-effectively indicating their hegemonic social position and hence their ability to construct history through public narratives that were commentaries on the present for future generations. Such statements implicitly suggest a non-reflexive transcending of the self.

The invitation to young people included the possibility of acting as social interpreters for a future reader with those who adopted this role implicitly becoming what Giddens (1994: 82 and 65) called 'guardians' 'who supply interpretations'. The 14-17 year olds, particularly the boys were most likely to do this, adopting the role of cultural interpreter for future generations in areas related to cultural change, economic development, national and international conflict and technological and musical developments. In some cases the commentary referred to a specific geographical area:

*'In the last decade Ireland has taken the first tentative steps towards becoming a modern cosmopolitan European country. At the root of this transformation has been the Celtic Tiger economy..... This economic boom has a downside however. In recent years crime rates have spiralled while the homeless and impoverished have felt more alienated from mainstream society.. However there is much to be positive about...' (John, Transition Year, Second Level).*

In other cases it included references to the situation of young people globally-suggesting that football and music were key motifs in the lives of 'most red blooded youngsters, even the girls' (implicitly differentiating the latter as an identifiable cohort):

*'The most important thing in the year 1999 (to most red blooded youngsters, even the girls) is football. We cant get enough of it. Its our way of life. The other big thing in our lives is Music. This to both boys and girls is important. The new music hitting the scene is Dance Music. The old people call it 'Rave' and associate it with drugs but of course they don't have a clue as I'm sure your parents wont either' (Kieran, Transition Year, Second Level).*

The one area where girls were likely to put themselves forward as social interpreters was in the area of fashion and appearance- sometimes recognising the similarities between their age cohort and previous ones:

*'Fashion! Looks! Labels! .... The fact of the matter is that no-one is happy with the way they look and to be popular and cool you have to be pretty thin. It mightn't be fair but that is life.....It is important to everyone to look good and even labels can give us confidence we lack.... We know that the first thing we notice about someone is there looks'... (Mary, Transition Year, Second Level)*  
*'Yeah we all still wear jeans, trainers, mini-skirts and belly tops, but hipsters, bellbottoms and platform shoes are all becoming the new craze and causing a new era in fashion. Who would have thought that I'd be wearing practically the same things my dad wore +- 20 years ago!'* (Anita, Transition Year, Second Level)

Where a largely negative picture of the present was outlined, there was often a suggestion (as in Bauman's 1986 accounts of dog dealers in Canton) that the narrator did not expect to be believed or saw himself as out of step with his peers *'Most of my friends are writing about how wonderful Ireland is and making it out to be a paradise. This is not the way I see it'* (Colin Transition Year, Second Level). Similarly, Tom, who is providing a global commentary, opens by saying that he is not going to lie and tries to establish his own credentials by asserting that he is non-racist and a believer in equality. His sense of helplessness is implicit in the text- with his conclusion moving to a very different level and referring to comedians - comedy being the genre that is rooted in the littleness of man:

*'I am not going to lie [underlined in text] to you....There is a lot of hunger in the world to-day. There are a lot of people trying to help. I would always love to help these people in need. I don't believe in hate or greed. There are people who are racist. I'm not. I believe everyone is equal.....There is a lot of good in the world. There are a lot of comedians to-day making people happy. But the best one is Billy Connolly... I am telling you the truth about all this'* (Tom, Transition Year, Second Level)

In summary then, social commentaries can be regarded as non-reflexive, and arguably reflect and maintain hegemonic discourses. It was striking that they were for the most part written by young men. Their concerns were wide ranging. There was a suggestion that, as they saw it, those who presented largely negative views were not likely to be believed (arguably reflecting the idea that social interpreters create or maintain hegemonic discourses). The only area where girls provided such social



commentaries were those relating to fashion- a stereotypically gendered concern and one arguably unrelated to patriarchal hegemony.

### **Summary**

Drawing on young people's narratives within a rapidly changing society such as Ireland this chapter looked at modes of reflexivity involving a search for authenticity; critical moments; references to internal emotional states; other references to the body and to role models. Gender variation occurred in some of these modes of reflexivity. Thus for example, references to a search for authenticity was most likely to occur amongst the 14-17 year old girls. Furthermore, although both boys and girls referred to critical moments the content of these varied. Thus, amongst the girls, critical moments revolved around connectedness, while amongst the boys they revolved around attempts to establish hierarchical dominance mainly through football. References to negative emotional states, although rare, were most likely to be made by the 14-17 year old boys. In so far as positional identities were referred to, boys were most likely to refer to nationhood and they were also most likely to present themselves as authoritative interpreters of a wide range of economic, political, social and cultural phenomena for future generations.

The scarcity of references to positional identities (other than age) by boys and the girls at both ages was striking. Hence it seems plausible to suggest that for boys and girls the challenge of the reflexive project of the self is a very real one although it is one that girls are in some ways facing more effectively than boys-reflecting a greater compatibility between introspection and ways of 'doing girl'. However rising levels of binge drinking amongst young women as well as young men, and similar levels of attempted suicide are salutary. However despite the underlying importance of gender in mapping their narratives, there were only occasional references to gender as a positional identity.

There were age differences, not surprisingly, in the modes of reflexivity in these narratives. Thus for example, arguably reflecting their life stage, the 10-12 year olds

did not refer to a search for authenticity nor did they provide social commentaries, while they were more likely than the 14-17 year olds to refer to role models and to the characteristics of their physical body. However there were also similarities. Thus like the 14-17 year olds, they referred to positive internal emotional states and to clothes. It was noticeable that 'boundary crossing' where it existed was most likely to occur amongst 10-12 year old girls- raising the issue of the differential value attached to maleness and femaleness.

Cultural influences on constructions of the self in late modernity do not occur in a vacuum. The shape they take is affected by the existing social and cultural context and the constructions of self that are current at that time. Ireland is an interesting case example, since constructions of womanhood are in a recognised flux, and there has been a reluctance to engage with constructions of manhood. These texts suggest that in these circumstances, gender has become a repressed but crucially important framework in the construction of young people's sense of self.

## Chapter 7: Young People's Life Styles

### Introduction

Butler (1990: 25) has been amongst those who have suggested that identity is a 'performative accomplishment'-that it is 'constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results'; and that repeated patterns of behaviour 'congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance' (ibid: 33). In this context, young people's life styles can be seen as reflective of an identity that we presume exists (Miles, 2000; Sardiello, 1998). With a small number of notable exceptions, we know relatively little about young people's life styles in Ireland although Fahey et al's (2005a) work has provided us with a picture of their participation in sporting activities and their exposure to TV and De Roiste and Dinneen (2005) their participation in and views about their, broadly defined, recreation and leisure activities; and there is also evidence to show that young people in Ireland use escapist mood altering drugs to a greater extent than their European counterparts- and, at least in the case of alcohol, do so to excess several times a month (ESPAD, 2004; HBSC, 2004).

In the present study young people's references to sports and media and cultural activities were regarded as part of a performance-based concept of identity. It will be shown that as regards these two aspects of their life styles, the young people at both ages in this study were 'doing gender' (Butler, 1990). This seems paradoxical since very few of the young people referred to themselves as boys or girls. However this may reflect the fact that gender although depicted as irrelevant in the school context (Williams 2000 and Sacks, 1992) is nevertheless crucially important in mapping young people's experiences in such contexts (Lynch, 1989b; Lynch and Lodge, 2002). Interestingly, gender patterns were less obvious in the other aspects of their life styles: risk taking; consumerism and contact with extended family, and we will speculate on the reasons for this difference.

## **Sports**

It is suggested that the relationship between sports and gender is socially and culturally constructed. It has been widely noted (Connell, 1995b; Lesko, 2001; Willis, 1990; Haywood and Mac an Ghiall, 2003; Frost, 2003; Frosh, 2003) that sport has become a key element in defining masculinity in Western Society, not least because of the perceived relationship between masculinity and men's bodies: with football being one of the main signifiers of masculinity (Epstein et al, 2001). Lahelma (2000) also suggested that strength, toughness and group solidarity reflected key elements in hegemonic masculinity, and such elements are arguably reflected in and reinforced by sport. References to sports in these young people's accounts included those related to participation in and watching sports, mainly football, at the local and international level. It will be shown that both were highly gendered.

### ***References to Participation in Sport***

It has been widely noted that physical activity amongst young people tends to drop after the early teenage years, with girls showing a sharper drop off in such physical activity as they age, and being more likely to lead sedentary lives (see Hanafin et al, 2007). Fahey et al's work (2005) provided some insight into such trends. Thus almost two thirds of the boys in their study at Second Level agreed that they liked participating in sports when there was 'lots of pressure to win', whereas only just over a third of the girls liked participating in sports in those situations. Girls were also more likely to mind going outside for sports in bad weather (54 per cent of the girls versus 23 per cent of the boys); to mind being kicked, knocked or falling over during sport (41 per cent versus 21 per cent); and they were more likely to mind getting hot, sweaty or dirty (44 per cent as compared with 14 per cent). Thus pressure to win, going out in bad weather, being involved in rough physical activity and getting hot, sweaty and dirty were much more problematic for girls than boys. Yet these are the preferences that are ignored by those providing or fostering an interest in team based physical contact sports. Interestingly, although the trends were in the same direction, the majority of both boys and girls minded if they got left out of teams because they were not good enough (53 per cent and 68 per cent respectively). This underlines the

fact that the greatest gender differences were in the areas of pressure to win, going out in bad weather, being involved in rough physical activity and getting hot, sweaty and dirty.

Yet Fahey et al (2005) found that, some extent at First level, and to an even greater extent at Second Level in Ireland, physical education, including in-school activities was dominated by physical contact competitive team sports, such as soccer, badminton, basketball and Gaelic football. This can be seen as reflecting a male dominated agenda. Dance and swimming (which were more favoured by the girls) were included in the physical education curriculum but they were offered in less than one in five of the Second Level schools, despite the fact that facilities to allow such activities were available on or off site in between three fifths and three quarters of the Second Level schools. Interestingly, in view of the typically poorer facilities at First Level, the trends were less extreme at that level-with for example, 39 per cent of the girls as compared with 24 per cent of the boys participating in dance at that level as compared with 24 per cent of the girls and four per cent of the boys at Second Level. Hence it seems plausible to conclude that a male dominated agenda as regards in-school physical activities, which marginalised in-school physical activities preferred by girls, was more dominant at Second Level than at First level. Furthermore, this pattern was reflected in and reinforced by the activities of the Youth Field Sports programme, which provides paid games development officers to assist schools with sports development- but specifically focuses on Gaelic games, soccer and rugby: competitive team based physical contact sports are those that are more favoured by boys than girls. The implicit message in such resourcing and in the overall focus of in-school activities is that boys' preferences as regards physical activity are more important than girls' – a message that becomes louder as one advances in the school cycle and that is reinforced by the activities of voluntary organisations such as the Youth Field Sports Programme. Indeed, De Roiste and Dinneen (2005) on the basis of their extensive survey of Irish 12-18 year olds, recommended the greater promotion of individual sports in general, and dance in particular, in view of the significant decline in sports participation amongst young women as they get older.

Fahey et al (2005) also found that there were gender differences in boys' and girls' participation in sports clubs outside school, and this was greatest at Second Level. Thus, whereas 60 per cent of the boys and 50 per cent of the girls in fifth and sixth class in First Level were involved with sports clubs outside school on at least two days per week; almost two thirds of the boys and only 41 per cent of the girls at Second Level participated in them at least two days per week. Amongst those at Second Level very high participation in such clubs (four days per week) and never participating in them were also gendered (25 per cent of the boys, but only 11 per cent of the girls participating in such clubs at least four days per week; and 15 per cent of the boys and 28 per cent of the girls never doing so). The gendered patterns of such participation in clubs could reflect their availability in the local community. In any case more than three quarters of the boys participated in clubs in gaelic football (29 per cent), soccer (31 per cent) or hurling (18 per cent). Amongst the girls, the picture was much more fragmented: with the most popular clubs being gaelic football (14 per cent); dance (13 per cent), followed by swimming (9 per cent); soccer (9 per cent) and camogie (9 per cent) clubs. Amongst those at First Level, the patterns were similarly gendered although they were interestingly very much less fragmented amongst the girls. Thus, soccer (40 per cent) and gaelic football (37 per cent) were again most frequently mentioned clubs by the boys; while swimming (29 per cent) and dance (29 per cent) are the most frequently mentioned ones by the girls- implicitly suggesting that there was less pressure on them to reject such 'female' activities at that age and/or that such facilities were available for younger girls so that they did not have to diversify their choices or engage in 'boundary crossing'.

The importance of sports as signifiers of gendered identity was also suggested in the present study. Thus boys aged 10-12 and 14-17 years were, with one notable exception, more likely than similar age girls to refer to participating in sporting activities. Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) sports (such as gaelic football and hurling/camogie) were the most common participative sports referred to by the 10-12 year old boys: with 40 per cent of them referring to playing these sports as compared with 22 per cent of the girls. Such sports were also the most common participative

sports referred to by the 14-17 year old boys and although the proportion referring to them was much lower (18 per cent) at that age there were similar gender differences. These patterns, which have also been noted by Fahey et al (2005), may reflect the fact that only the most committed continue playing sports at this age, in the presence of a greater range of alternative ways of 'doing boy/girl' (such as meeting the opposite sex, drinking, 'hanging out' with friends, earning money through part-time work). Similar gendered patterns existed at both age levels amongst those referring to playing soccer. They reflect the patterns emerging in Fahey et al's study as regards boys greater enjoyment of competitive, physical contact, ball related team based sports to boys. Such team based activities provided opportunities to develop skills, 'ways of thinking about, regulating and developing the body' as well as the opportunity to develop a social network (Willis, 1990:110/111). Some of the girls did enjoy such activities. However the crucial point is that girls were less likely than boys to do something that with some notable exceptions (e.g. De Roiste and Dinneen, 2005) is being ignored by those concerned with low levels of physical activity amongst girls:

*'My favourite sport is soccer because I think I am a very skilful player. My greatest ambition is to be a soccer player' (Dermot, Fifth Class, First Level)*  
*'my hobbies are football, camogie, swimming and running. My favourite one is camogie because it is great fun and you make new friends on the team' (Carol, Transition Year, Second Level ).*

#### INSERT TABLE 6.1

Young people can and do contest gender signifiers (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). Thus despite the increasing popularity of football amongst girls (reputed to be one of the fastest growing sports in Ireland with roughly a third of the girls at Second Level in Fahey's study, 2005, participating in it.) the texts suggested that it had not been fully assimilated into gender definitions. Thus Carol (Fifth Grade, First Level) referred to pressure on her to conform to a gender stereotype that does not include football-one that she rejects: *'Most people slag me saying 'girls dont play football' but I love playing football'*. References to the 'normal' gender patterns of activities were also made- with the deviation from these also implicitly underlining their stereotypical male gendered character: *'My favourite sport is football because it is very rough'* (Lena, Fifth Grade, First Level). There was also some evidence that the 10-12 year old girls were reflexively aware of their own role as trailblazers *'We made*

*History today it was the first girls [football] team ever* - the 'we' suggesting a collective reframing of gendered definitions. Interestingly, there was also no realisation amongst these 10-12 year old girls that certain options such as *'to play laides soccer over at Man UTD soccer club'* or *'to play for Arsenal because you get pay a lot of money'* would simply not be open to them because of their gender.

As previously mentioned girls have been shown to participate less in physical contact, team sport than boys (see Furlong and Carmel, 1997; Fahey et al, 2005; Dr Roiste and Dinneen, 2005). Perhaps not surprisingly then, amongst the girls in both age groups, the references to sport that occurred most often were to non-team based sports (such as roller blading, pool, cycling, swimming, dancing etc). Thus, 36 per cent of the 10-12 year old girls and 17 per cent of the 14-17 year old girls referred to such activities as compared with 22 per cent and 13 per cent respectively of the boys. Indeed, only in these non-team based participative sports was girls' participation in both age groups greater than boys:

*'I go cycling and roller blading every day with my friends'* (Gillian, Fifth Class, First Level)

*'When I want to have fun with my friends, I go to lesureplex for a game of Q-sar and bowling'* (Deirdre, Transition Year, Second Level)

De Roiste and Dinneen (2005) also noted that individual sports were significantly more popular amongst the young women in their study. Obviously insofar as attempts to involve girls in physical activity are serious, inside or outside the schools, the increased availability of facilities to support such activities is crucial.

Sporting activity can however also occur in the context of the family-and this seems particularly likely to be so in the case of more expensive prestige sports. One in five of the 10-12 year olds referred to participating in what could be regarded as such expensive prestige sports' activities (such as golf, skiing and horse riding). There was little gender variation in references to these activities amongst the 10-12 year olds. Such activities (which are not necessarily enjoyed by the young people) can be seen as reflecting a broader class related family lifestyle (see Griffiths, 1995; Frost, 2003).

*'The most exciting thing that ever happened to me was the first time I went skiing. And I've loved going there ever since I go every winter with my Mom'* (Aileen, Fifth Class, First Level)



*'It comes to me now I don't really like golf but I often go to the Golf Club with my parents to play'. (Linda Fifth Class, First Level)*

Amongst the 14-17 year olds, the older boys were more likely than the older girls to refer to such activities (16 per cent versus 9 per cent). This may reflect patterns of 'patriarchal privileging' (Connell, 1995a) since participation in such activities at this age arguably necessitates family decisions as regards expenditure (with the 14-17 year olds being less likely to be covered by family memberships). Such patterns of patriarchal privileging have been shown to exist in other contexts, with boys getting more pocket money than girls (McCoy and Smyth, 2004); and doing less domestic work in the family (Leonard, 2004a).

Overall then references to playing sport were affected by age and gender. As in Fahey et al's study, team based, physical contact sports were most likely to be referred to by boys although there was evidence that football as a gender signifier was being contested by the 10-12 year old girls. Non-team sports were the only kinds of participative sporting activities that were most likely to be referred to by girls than boys- such trends being consistent with those emerging in Fahey et al's study (2005).

### ***References to Following Sports***

International soccer was the most common sport followed: the proportion of boys who referred to following it was more than twice as big as the proportion of girls doing so at each age level (25 per cent versus 11 per cent amongst the 10-12 year olds and 13 per cent versus five per cent amongst the 14-17 year olds). The 10-12 year old boys were most likely of all to refer to the sports they followed: 43 per cent of them doing so as compared with 23 per cent of the 14-17 year old boys. These younger boys were particularly likely to make a connection between the sport they followed, their place of residence, their sporting ambitions and/or or their own favourite participative sport:

*'I play a lot of sport and my favourite one is hurling. I also like soccer, Gaelic football and swimming. My favourite hurler is Joe Deane and my favourite soccer player is Roy Keane. Both of these players come from Cork' (John, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'My favourite player is Roy Keane, and my favourite team is Manchester United. My greatest ambition is to be a soccer player' (Donal, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Lesko (2001:155) stressed that football matches, like other public spectacles mobilised emotions, they 'invented group ties, by creating both pasts and futures'. The meaning of non-participative sports appeared closely related to a sense of identity reflected in young men's identification with a team (a topic that was explored in the context of the discussion of critical moments in Chapter 6). There appeared to be an association between following a sport played by men and gender identity in so far as 30 per cent of the 10-12 year old boys followed sports played solely by men, as compared with one per cent of the girls of the same age following sports played solely by women. Even where girls supported male international football teams, they saw this as unusual for girls-thus implicitly underlining their gendered character:

*'I support Brazil in football. I love football a lot and I am the only girl in my class who likes football that much' (Laura, Fifth Grade, First Level).*

Overall then as in Lahelma's (2000:12) study, although overwhelmingly the young people in this study did not refer to gender when talking about sports, it 'still appeared as a self evident backdrop'. Gender differentiated trends existed in both age groups, with boys not only being more likely to play competitive, team based physical contact sports, such as GAA and soccer, but also being more likely to follow sports, especially international soccer. Participation in non-team based sports was the only kind of sporting activity that girls were more likely than boys to refer to. Hence it seemed plausible to conclude that in this as in other studies competitive team based physical contact sports were centrally involved in the reproduction of gender. It also seems plausible to suggest that insofar as this is ignored and facilities provided only for such sports, girls low levels of participation in physical activity will continue. Finally, there were age differences, with the 14-17 year olds being less likely than the 10-12 year olds to refer to any kind of sport. It is impossible to know to what extent this simply reflects the greater variety in the content of their texts and/or the existence of other ways of doing boy/girl.

### **Media related and Cultural activities**

Savage et al (2005:153) noted that 'the significance of the media for undermining place- bound social relationships has been emphasised by numerous theorists who

make much of the capacity of the media to transmit information rapidly over vast distances as a key globalising force'. However they also noted that there was relatively little known about the use of the media in everyday life that could test this thesis of cultural globalisation. Indeed it has been suggested that 'the paradigmatic experience of global modernity for most people ...is that of staying in one place but experiencing the 'displacement' that global modernity brings to them' (Tomlinson as quoted by Morley, 2000:15). In this study media related activities were mainly defined as including those involving computer games, the Internet, television, hi-fi, radio, videos and mobile phones (Livingstone, 2002) although chart music was also included. In addition, reference is made to traditional cultural activities such as playing music and reading.

In the case of media related activities both Livingstone (2002) and Rygaard (2003) have stressed the importance of locating these in the context of their potential availability. Since these are for the most part, home based activities, such availability at its most basic level is related to the existence of these types of media within the household and to young people's access to them. Such data was not available in the texts used in this study. However, nationally, at the household level, although computers and Internet connections are still a minority phenomenon, they are a rapidly increasing one. Levels of use of both are highest amongst young people, with roughly three quarters of those using them doing so at least once a week (QNHS, 2003).

### ***References to Media activities –including computer games and TV***

It has been widely recognised that the consumption of media is gendered. Ging (2005) noted that it is widely asserted that the media has an important impact on gender constructions, but that there is a scarcity of actual evidence on this topic. Her own work focused on young men and suggested that: 'mediated fictions are part of wider gender scripts...that both inform and are informed by the social structures within which (male) viewers are immersed' (ibid: 29). Thus in her study of the media use of 15-17 year old Irish boys: 'male-oriented genres and stereotypical representations of

masculinity were strongly evident in participants' tastes and preferences across all media forms' (ibid: 33).

She found that stereotypical representations of masculinity were most evident in 15-17 year olds' depiction of computer games as well as films: violence, fighting, action and sex being key ingredients in those depicted as male, with romance, dancing, singing, designing things and creating families being key ingredients in those depicted as female. Furthermore, Lodge (2004: 177) suggested that exposure to global influences, such as the television programmes featuring lead female characters provided girls with 'an opportunity to... push out the boundaries of what it means to be female'. Indeed, Haywood et al (2005:205) suggested that 'Fascination with cartoons, computer games and board games that contained a high content of violence, aggression and toughness were juxtaposed but carried with it a 'benign boyiness' that was inclusive of girls and other boys' (Haywood et al, 2005: 205).

However there has been some suggestion that the acceptability of specific gender depictions might vary cross culturally. Thus, for example, Holloway and Valentine (2000) showed that in their study of British 11-16 year olds, the 'techie boys' were seen as deviating from 'normal masculinity' so that their sexuality was questioned. However Haywood and Mac an Ghiall (2003) suggested that increased funding for technology related careers could change the status of this kind of vocational knowledge. It is possible that being a male 'techie' is less problematic in Irish than in British society given the state's commitment to developing the information technology industry as a site of high quality jobs (CSO, 2003). In any case, gendered patterns as regards references to computer related activities (including computer games and the internet) emerged in this as in other studies, although the gender differences seemed greater in Irish studies (see Livingstone, 2002 and De Roiste and Dinneen, 2005 respectively). In the present study boys in both the 10-12 and 14-17 year age groups were more likely than their female counterparts to refer to such computing related activities, although some of the girls used computers to complement their enjoyment of more traditional cultural activities, such as reading:

*'I like to surf the net with my daddy and play games on the computer' (Brian, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'I like playing on our computer. The computer games I like are Carmen Sandiago, its about geography and Story book Weaver [which] is about writing stories (Vicky, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Reference to such activities was greatest amongst the younger boys: and this may reflect either a cohort effect or the increasing pace of technological change. In any case, 33 per cent of 10-12 year old boys referred to computer related activities as compared with 14 per cent of the girls of that age. Gender patterns also existed amongst the 14-17 year olds: with 12 per cent of the boys and only three per cent of the girls referring to such activities.

TV ownership in Ireland has been estimated to be almost universal - with the viewing hours of Irish households being above the EU average (ODTR, 1998). Livingstone (2002) noted that in the UK study, television remained by far and away the most popular medium, being watched by virtually all young people for an average of two and a half hours per day. Similarly, Fahey et al (2005) using Irish data, found that roughly four fifths of the boys and girls in fifth and sixth class in First Level and in Transition Year at Second Level, watched TV for 1-3 hours on a weekday night, with roughly three fifths doing so on a weekend night. They found (as did De Roiste and Dinneen, 2005) that there was little difference by age or by gender- although the First Level girls were slightly more likely than their male counterparts to watch 1-3 hours TV, particularly on weekend nights- possible reflecting the fact that, as suggested by McRobbie and Garber (1999/76) a female 'teenybopper' culture was catered for by an almost totally packaged cultural commodity in a context where real boys remained a threatening and mysterious phenomena.

Savage et al (2005) found that in their study of UK adults, although most of their respondents spent a significant part of their lives watching TV, there was a great deal of defensiveness in their references to doing this. Such attitudes were not at all evident amongst the young people in this study who easily emphasised their agency in referring to the kinds of programmes that they liked. These kinds of programmes suggested that gender patterns were also reflected in and reinforced by these cultural

resources and reflected ways of ‘doing boy’ and ‘doing girl’ in both age groups. For the girls, American programmes were very salient. Thus, the girls in both age groups were more likely than their male counterparts to refer to US teen drama such as *Buffy*, the Vampire Slayer, *Sabrina*, *Dawson’s Creek*, *Ally Mc Beal*, *Sweet Valley High* (18 per cent versus 11 per cent in the case of the 10-12 year olds and five and two per cent in the case of the 14-17 year olds). INSERT TABLE 6.2

‘Soaps’ (such as *Coronation Street*; *East Enders* etc) were not generally referred to by these young people, although of those who did do so, girls were more likely than boys to refer to them. Haywood and Mac an Ghiall (2003) suggested that in their study of First Level boys, cartoons containing high levels of violence and aggression were one of the ways that they enacted gender (‘doing boy’). Interestingly, only a very small minority of the young people in this study referred to anarchic comedy programmes (including the *Simpsons* and *South Park*). However, of those who did, boys were more likely than the girls to refer to them.

Overall then, references to television and television programmes were very common in these texts. There was a suggestion that the kind of programmes these young people watched reflected and reinforced ways of ‘doing boy/girl’ - with the girls at both ages being most likely to refer to watching US Teen TV.

### ***References to Chart Music and/or to Traditional Cultural Activities***

In the present study as in Livingstone’s (2002), girls aged 10-12 years and 14-17 years were more likely than their male counterparts to refer to chart music (i.e. music that was in the top 30 charts during the week when the data was collected: such as Boyzone, Westlife, Five, Britney Spears etc). This was in fact one of the few areas where although the music was part of the international entertainment industry, through references to Irish bands such as Westlife and Boyzone, it was possible to identify Irish ‘common cultural referents which were known to be widely shared’, as a means of emphasising belonging to an ‘imagined national community’ (Savage et al, 2005: 175). Chart music was particularly likely to be referred to by the 10-12 year old

girls: 36 per cent of them referring solely to chart music in their texts, as compared with 15 per cent of the 10-12 year old boys.

*'Music I love because you can just relax listening to it. My favourite bands are Steps, Five, Vanga Boys, Celine Dion, Robbie Williams and Marie Cary' (Sandra, Fifth Class, First Level)*

It is possible to argue that both the singers and the lyrics (which frequently have a strong emotional component) are important in affecting their enjoyment of such music. It was also clear that in some cases their enjoyment of these singers was related to their identification with them: *'Britney Spears inspires me as I would love to sing' (Vanessa, Fifth Class, First Level)*. Such references were less common amongst the 14-17 year old girls – although they were still more likely than their male counterparts to refer to such music (14% versus five per cent). Indeed, there was a suggestion that boys of this age group were more likely to use music as a way of signalling difference rather than similarity:

*'I passionately detest the music of to day. I listen to much older music, the Blues of the 1920's -1980's, Rock Music of the 1960's -1980's' (Marty, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Traditional cultural activities such as reading and playing a musical instrument can be regarded as the least globalised of the cultural media. Although the girls at both ages were most likely to refer to chart music, they were also more likely than the boys of the same age to refer to a range of other cultural influences and activities (Similar trends emerged in De Roiste and Dinneen's 2005 study). In the present study amongst the 10-12 year olds, the trends as regards reading were gendered but in the opposite direction to those involving computer related activities. Thus, the girls were most likely to refer to reading as a hobby: 22 per cent of them doing so as compared with 11 per cent of the boys: *'my favourite [hobby] is reading' (Grainne, Fifth Class, First Level)*. Similar strong gender differentiated patterns have also emerged in other studies (see Hanafin et al, 2007) and may simply reflect girls' greater reading ability. They may also however reflect the greater perceived gender appropriateness of reflective and broadly cultured activities for girls than boys. The latter interpretation was compatible with the fact that girls in both age groups were also more likely than their same age male counterparts to refer to playing a musical instrument (see also Livingstone, 2002). Differences in references to such activities were greatest amongst

the 10-12 year old girls. Thus, 15 per cent of the 10-12 year old girls referred to playing a musical instrument, as compared with 5 per cent of the boys. In some cases this was linked to wider cultural activities:

*'I have been playing tinwhistle with Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann since I was seven. I practice every Saturday and we have a seisun on the last Friday of every month' (Tess, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'My after school activities include piano lessons, and I am also a member of the Musical Society' (Donna, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'I play the cello, keyboard and guitar. I also compose my own music' (Lorna, Transition Year, Second Level)*

Broadly similar kinds of gendered patterns also appeared in Fahey et al's (2005) study and in De Roiste and Dinneen's (2005). In the present study more than twice as many boys as girls in fifth and sixth class in First Level and in Transition Year in Second Level in that study did not take part in music/singing/drama classes outside school. At the opposite extreme, more than twice as many girls as boys in fifth and sixth class in First Level attended classes in such activities for at least three hours per week. Such gendered patterns are not peculiar to Ireland. Thus Furlong and Cartmel (1997) found that girls were more likely than boys to read literature, listen to classical music and to be more likely to play a musical instrument. Such patterns raise fundamental questions about gender differences in cultural experiences and in definitions of masculinity/femininity- differences that become particularly crucial in a societal context where institutional power remains overwhelmingly in male hands.

Overall, then references to media and communication technologies were much more common amongst the 10-12 year olds' than the 14-17 year olds' texts. There were clear gender patterns as regards such references. Thus, at both ages boys were more likely to refer to computer related activities; and girls were more likely to refer to listening to chart music and watching US Teen TV. It seems possible to suggest then that rather than transforming 'doing gender', such global media were accessed in such a way that they reflected and reinforced current gendered patterns. (In other situations, such as those relating to future careers, it was argued in Chapter 6 that they broadened possibilities). It was striking that the range of such activities that the 10-12 year old boys referred to was narrower and more dependent on global media than those referred to by the girls. Thus it was the girls who were more likely to refer to



traditional cultural activities. Such patterns are consistent with the trends emerging in Fahey et al's Irish study (2005) and with similar trends in other countries and raise the issue of the narrowness of the cultural resources used for 'doing man' (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) and hence the difficulty of transforming the content of hegemonic masculinity.

### **Other aspects of their Life Styles**

Here, drawing particularly on the literature, we focus on a number of other aspects of young people's life styles: risk taking, consumerism and visiting extended family and homework (see Chapter 5 for those aspects which have a specific spatial component)

Dobson et al (2006:50) suggested that 'courting risk' which they saw 'as a sign of planned normlessness' was an important aspect of young people's lives in their final year in high school in Norway, with excessive alcohol consumption being a key element in this experience. However, in that society the situations where this occurred were highly prescribed, and could be seen as constituting a rite of passage to adulthood. Amongst the young people in this study, alcohol seemed to be much more a routine part of a present oriented leisure activity where getting drunk was seen as an essential element in having a good time, although there were occasional concerns expressed by the young people about this:

*'Life for teenagers in Ireland is very pressured as far as Alcohol and Drugs. Most of my friends drink regularly and I see that they have a lot of problems already' (Joe, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'Smoking and drinking....some people [do these] just to prove that they are big people' (Kay, Transition Year, Second Level)*

In the present study young people re-framed socially problematic behaviour such as excessive alcohol consumption by depicting it as 'having a buzz' and, in some cases, reflecting an adventurous approach to life (Lupton and Tulloch, 2002). Thus the excessive consumption of alcohol before and during such discos/nightclubs was seen as normal and was embedded within networks of peer obligation as regards watching out for each other when they had too much to drink- the acceptance of drunkenness being consistent with the trends emerging in the European School Project –with more than half of the Irish 15 year olds in that study reporting that they had five or more alcoholic drinks in a row in the past 30 days (ESPAD, 2004). Furthermore, in the

ESPAD study the proportion of girls who reported such binge drinking had increased substantially in less than ten years (from 42 per cent in 1995 to 57 per cent in 2003)- suggesting an increased adoption of male patterns:

*'My Saturday nights will still be spent in nightclubs with my friends dancing away to fast dance music and the latest hits. Sometimes minding a friend who may have had too much to drink and half laughing, half worrying about my friends who were refused entrance because they had no identification card (either real or fake) to prove they were 18' (Lorraine, Transition Year, Second Level).*

In the present study, where other people's drug related activity was referred to, some of it at least, particularly involving heroin, was seen as a social problem, while their own drug use was presented as a reaction to boredom and/or reflecting a desire for new experiences (see Shildrick, 2002):

*'Over the week-ends I go out with my friends. We get drunk and have a buzz. I'm not into drugs but I might try something once in a while' (Sheena, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'Me and my best friend tried cannabis recently ...we were curious and bored with life-the idea of a totally new experience appealed to us, the usual textbook reasons' (Lena, Transition Year, Second Level)*

There was no gender differentiation in such activities. This is consistent with the trends emerging at national level where roughly two fifths of both boys and girls had used an illicit drug (other than marijuana) over their lifetime-putting the Irish young people fourth out of 36 countries, with almost double the average proportion who had used such illicit drugs during their own lifetime (ESPAD 2004; see also HBSC, 2003). Furthermore, as in the case of binge drinking, the gender differentiated trends, with lower levels of such activities amongst 15 year old girls, had disappeared between 1995 and 2003 (Hanafin et al, 2007). It seemed plausible to suggest that young women were aping the activities of young men in these areas, in a context where the societal message was still that young men were more valuable than young women.

A number of authors have highlighted the importance of consumption, suggesting that it is one of the important ways through which young people construct their identity in a late modern society (Frost, 2003; Miles, 2000; Miles et al, 1998; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). Thus it has been suggested that: 'The market offers not just goods, but goods attached to versions of selfhood' (Frost, 2003: 54; see also Miles, 2000).

Furlong and Cartmel (1997) argued that although subjectively people felt that their life styles reflected their individual choices, in fact they reflected structural realities (see Frost, 2003; Gordon and Lahelma, 2002). Consumerism is widely seen as a pervasive and recent phenomenon in Ireland. However, although the 14-17 year olds in particular were keen to stress that they were '*typical adolescents*'; that their ideas were similar to those of any '*typical*' teenager: ('*Boys, music, clothes, fashion*'); their favourite music being '*a lot like that of my friends*', '*their favourite clothes, the kinds of magazines they read and the idols they had being*' '*similar to the rest of my class*' (Paula, Transition Year, Second Level) their depictions of their lives were by no means exclusively focussed on consumption:

*'My lifestyle is much like anyone my age here. I go to school, have a part-time job, go out at week-ends. I like listening to and playing music'* (Paul, Transition Year, Second Level').

*'If you asked many teenagers of our time what was important to them many of the answers would be identical, sports, clothes, my new mobile phone, my boyfriend/girlfriend, my friends or family'* (Donal, Transition Year, Second Level)

Miles (2000) noted that in his study of young people, money was a constant pre-occupation since it enabled young people to buy the consumer goods through which their identity was expressed. Willis (1990:85) noted that: 'As a cultural practice, however, shopping has tended to be marginalized in much of the writing about youth, style and fashion. Shopping has been considered a private and feminine activity'. In the present study, there was some evidence of consumerism-especially amongst the 14-17 year old girls-although shopping as a recreational activity was only referred to by a tiny minority of those in either age group (three to four per cent).

*'Money is a big, big object in my life. I love shopping til I drop'*(Deirdre, Transition Year, Second Level),

*'Most teenage girls spend a good a good part of their time shopping and I'm no exception'* ( Mary, Transition Year, Second Level),

*'I love buying clothes and I love money'* (Lorraine, Transition Year, Second Level)

Insofar as references to shopping existed, they were gendered: with six per cent of the 10-12 year old girls referring to such activity as compared with less than one per cent of the boys. However, there was a suggestion that part of the attractiveness of shopping for the girls in this younger age group was that it was a shared 'girls' activity with their mothers:

*'I like going out with My Mam and buying Tracksuits, Runners, Dresses, and lot's of Tops' (Anna, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'I enjoy going shopping on Saturdays with my mother as I like looking at the various fashion shops.'* (Hilda, Fifth Class, First Level)

Only a tiny minority (three per cent) of the 10-12 year olds (boys or girls) made any specific reference to designer labels-although it will be suggested in Chapter 8 that this may reflect the fact that such labels have become part of the idiom within which they perceive themselves and others. In the case of the younger children, it seemed possible to see references to fast food as also potentially reflecting a consumerist kind of life style. Again however only seven per cent of the 10-12 year olds referred to fast food: and no gender differences emerged.

Visiting extended family has long been depicted as an important motif in Irish life styles (Hannan and Katsiaouni, 1973) and Corcoran (2007) suggested that it remained 'a significant backdrop' in the young people's lives in that study. References were also made in this study to visiting extended family, particularly at week-ends (with the content of those relationships, and their reflection in patterns of caring from both sides being described in Chapter 3)

*'On Sunday evenings we go to my Granny and Grandad's house' (Steve, Fifth Class, First Level)*

*'On Sundays [we] go down to my Auntie Martina's house. She owns a Horse farm. She has twenty horses of her own'. (Jo, Fifth Class, First Level)*

Overall then, references to risk taking were most likely to occur amongst the 14-17 year olds, and there was no suggestion that such patterns were gender differentiated. As regards consumerism, the evidence was complex. Thus although there was evidence from the qualitative study as regards the importance of money in the lives of the 14-17 year olds, only a tiny minority of the young people referred to shopping, designer labels or fast food. References to shopping were gender differentiated although at least amongst the 10-12 year olds there was a suggestion that an enjoyment of the shopping experience reflected its perception as a shared 'girls activity' rather than simply one related to consumption. Finally, visiting extended family was most likely to be referred to by the 10-12 year olds, highlighting the fact that at least in this context, continuity was very much a feature of Irish life.

## **Summary**

Ireland is a society that has undergone very rapid economic, social and cultural change. It is also a society which purports to be gender neutral but where men and women's lives remain culturally very clearly differentiated; and where men continue to dominate the economic, political, legal, and religious institutions (O'Connor, 2000a; 1998a). As in Lahelma's (2000) Finnish study, young people in Ireland to day are growing up in an educational system that purports to be gender neutral, and which ignores gendered differences in orientations, career choices and recreational activities. As an English speaking country, influenced by American popular culture and EU policies, Ireland has experienced substantial social and cultural changes during the lives of these young people. This chapter suggests that 'doing gender' is a reality in young people's life styles- with global phenomena being drawn on selectively to reinforce ways of doing boy/girl.

It was striking that there were highly gender differentiated patterns as regards boys and girls life styles in the areas of sports and media and culturally related activities. Indeed it seemed plausible to conclude that these areas were crucially important in the reproduction of ways of doing boy/girl. Thus participating in and watching team based, physical contact sports was crucially important in doing boy. Indeed Fahey et al's (2005) study suggested that the disproportionate encouragement of such activities by the educational system and voluntary organisations reflected and reinforced a male dominated agenda. In this context it was perhaps not surprising that boundary crossing was particularly evident amongst the girls as regards in this area. Gender differentiated trends were also evident in the area of media and cultural activities: with the boys being most likely to refer to computer related activities and the girls to teen TV and chart music. Interestingly however there were no gender differences as regards risk taking life styles amongst the 14-17 year olds- a pattern that one might speculate also reflects the implicit societal valorisation of stereotypically male life styles and their adoption by teenage girls.

There were also of course age differences with 10-12 year old boys were most likely to refer to globalising phenomena such as computer related activities and to following international soccer; and also to the most local of activities namely participating locally in GAA team sports such as gaelic football and hurling. The 10-12 year old girls were more likely to refer to globalising phenomena such as listening to chart music and watching US teen drama on TV, although they were also more likely to refer to a range of traditional cultural influences (such as reading and playing music). Overall then, it seems possible to conclude that, as suggested by Ging (2005), globalisation supports limited cultural constructions of masculinity. However in a context where boundary crossing is eroding gender differences, global elements can be used to extend cultural constructions of femininity.

References to sports and to media related and cultural activities were less likely to occur in the 14-17 year olds texts. This may reflect methodological factors (such as the greater variety in the content of the 14-17 year olds texts). However similar gendered trends emerged with the boys of this age again being most likely to refer to computer related activities; to playing local team based sports; following international sports and going to discos/nightclubs. The 14-17 year old girls' life styles typically involved listening to music, watching TV, seeing friends, going to discos; with some references to participation in non-team based activities such as swimming; and occasional references to traditional cultural activities.

The ways in which these young people's life styles combined different elements was striking. Thus, references to computer related activities; supporting international soccer; watching American Teen Programmes on TV; listening to chart music were interwoven with references to playing hurling or gaelic football in a local club. Thus in both age groups and across genders it was possible to see a 'creole interplay' (Rygaard, 2003) between the global and the local so that these aspects of their life styles were best characterised as locally embedded within a global world in ways that reflected and reinforced gendered differences.

*'Every month I go to a disco in the community center with my friends.. I play hurling and Gaelic for Timonae. I have an N64 and a PC. I always watch South*

*Park -it is my favourite programme on TV. I support Man U and I watch them when they are on TV' (Barney, Transition Year, Second Level)*

*'In my free time, I like to watch television, read, cycle, walk, talk on the telephone, go down town with my friends, go to discos' (Anna, Transition Year, Second Level).*

It is to an exploration of the other spatial references in the young people's texts that we now turn.

**Table 6. 1: Age by references to Sporting activities, Controlling for Gender**

Gender	10-12	14-17	Total
Girls			
Playing GAA	22%	7%	20%
Playing Soccer only	5%	2%	4%
Playing Non team sports	36%	17%	33%
Playing Prestige sports	21%	9%	19%
Sports followed	15%	8%	14%
Following International soccer alone	11%	5%	10%
Boys			
Playing GAA	40%	18%	37%
Playing Soccer only	21%	10%	19%
Playing Non team sports	22%	13%	21%
Playing Prestige sports	19%	16%	18%
Sports followed	43%	23%	40%
Following International soccer alone	25%	13%	24%
Overall			
Playing GAA	30%	11%	28%
Playing Soccer only	12%	5%	11%
Playing Non team sports	30%	16%	28%
Playing Prestige sports	20%	12%	19%
Sports followed	28%	13%	26%
Following International Soccer alone	17%	8%	16%



**Table 6.2: Age by references to Cultural Media, Controlling for Gender**

Gender	10-12	14-17	Total
Girls			
Listen only to Chart Music	36%	14%	32%
Watch US Teen TV	18%	5%	16%
Computers	14%	3%	12%
Read	22%	8%	19%
Play musical Instrument	15%	6%	14%
Boys			
Listen only to Chart Music	15%	5%	14%
Watch US Teen TV	11%	2%	10%
Computers	33%	12%	31%
Read	11%	4%	10%
Play musical Instrument	5%	4%	5%
Overall			
Listen only to Chart Music	26%	11%	24%
Watch US Teen TV	15%	4%	13%
Computers	23%	7%	20%
Read	17%	6%	15%
Play musical Instrument	11%	6%	10%

Texts Written by young people (sub-sample=4,100 texts)

## **Chapter 8: Relationship Between Drawings/Lyrics and Written Texts**

### **Introduction**

The young people were invited to use the back pages of the written texts creatively for drawings/lyrics (see Chapter 2). It was impossible to choose between the written texts and such creative elements in terms of their validity, illustrating the difficulties involved in triangulation (Deacon et al, 1998; Bryman, 1992). The purpose of this chapter is to offer some insights into ways of doing boy/girl and individualisation/embeddedness and the global/local as reflected in the relationship between the written texts and in the back pages, as well as offering some insights into the methodological contribution made by the creative elements on the back page.

The difficulty of disentangling indicators of individualisation in a context where stereotypical gender scripts are being used will also be explored in this chapter. As outlined in Chapter 1, a number of theorists (such as Beck 1992, 1994; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991) suggested that young people's experiences could best be explored in terms of a theory of individualisation. They suggested that such individualisation is reflected in 'disembedding' as well as in direct or indirect references to choice. In this reflexive context, Giddens (1991:217) suggested that 'What gender identity is, and how it is expressed, has become a matter of multiple options'. However although gender is seen by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002: xxiv) as 'part of the collective moulding of individual behaviour' they also suggested that it was possible that 'elements of a gender-specific socialisation' were still at work in a late modern society, with gender not being consistently referred to by them as an outdated or zombie category (ibid: 113 and 203). This raises the question of the extent to which it is possible to identify indicators of individualisation when the text consists of stereotypical gendered elements. This underlying issue will be explored in this chapter, drawing on the content of the written texts and the back pages.

Key sites for the construction or reproduction of ways of doing boy in Western society have included sports, particularly physical contact team sports, gendered consumption items, cross gender relationships, fatherhood and gender segregated employment settings (Connell 2005; Willis, 1990). Lodge and Flynn (2001: 190) found that young female students aged 10-13 years tended to define themselves 'in ways that reflected traditional engendered expectations of behaviour, attitudes and characteristics' while a small number of girls, operated as 'boundary crossers' (Thorne, 1993). The key sites for the construction or reproduction of ways of doing girl have been identified as fashion, motherhood, relationships, gendered employment, pop music and teen TV (Ging, 2005; Jagger, 2002; O'Connor, 1998a). It has also been noted (Lodge, 2004: 177) that global influences provided girls with an opportunity 'to push out the boundaries of what it means to be female'. Hence although global elements were sometimes used to reinforce stereotypical ways of doing girl, they were also used expand such boundaries.

In this chapter we look first at those written texts and back pages that seemed broadly related at some level and which illustrated ways of doing boy/girl. Secondly we focus on those back pages that were related to the written text but where other themes were dominant. Thirdly we look at those where the drawings/lyrics had no relation to the written text and finally at those where the back page was blank. It is important to note that the chapter includes both some of the more typical examples that have been used earlier in the book as well as less typical ones so as to illustrate variation in the texts.

### **Drawings/Lyrics related to Written Text and featuring ways of 'Doing Boy/Girl'**

In this type the drawings/lyrics were related at some level to the written text and illustrated ways of doing boy/girl. For the most part, the dominant site for the construction of ways of doing boy was football (whether in a global or local context) although other sites were also referred to, with very occasional examples of boundary crossing (Lodge, 2005; Thorne, 1993). The sites for the construction of ways of doing girl were more varied.

### ***Doing Boy***

A variety of studies (including Lodge and Flynn's, 2001 Irish study) have shown that 10-12 year old boys' hobbies were particularly likely to revolve around football and other physical contact team based sports. In the present study, the boys' written texts featuring masculine 'narratives of remembering' frequently involved football matches (Mac an Ghiall, 1994:25). Examples of these are John (10-12 year olds) and Tony's (14-17 years old) written texts (see Chapter 7). Tony's written narrative begins by referring to his date of birth and the subsequent stages in his life. He identified sport as having a big impact on his life and his written text referred both to Ireland's defeat in the World Cup and to Kildare's defeat in Gaelic Football. For him, as for John, a moment in football of competitive triumph that affirmed a gendered identity is 'enough'. Tony's back page (like John's) focussed on a local football related event. In his case it consisted of a drawing of four team members holding up a Cup, with the caption specifying that it was the Leinster Final- '*a great day in my life*'. (INSERT FIGURE 8.1). In both cases although the written text included a global element, the back page did not. These texts can be seen as reflexively individualised, although the content also suggested stereotypical ways of doing boy.

Andy's written text (10-12 years old) also included stereotypical sites for the construction of ways of doing boy: a reference to a tree house that he had built with another boy; to his plans to join a boxing club and to playing football for a local club. Very unusually he included not only three same sex best friends but two opposite sex best friends '*in girls*' (one of them from his small class in First Level). His written text referred to where he came from and to his school as well as to a number of social events he had attended: a fun fair in the local town, a school tour to Dublin, the meal after his confirmation; and going to the cinema with three of his best friends where the girls '*went crying and me and Cormac had to keep it in*'- illustrating the kind of gendered emotional reserve described by Cleary (2005) in her work. There is no reference to cars in the written text although on the back page there is a large drawing of what he describes as 'a future car'. Hence the drawing like the written text can be seen as broadly reflecting a gendered narrative although it is unusual in including

boundary crossing (as reflected in opposite sex friendships). However the relationship between the drawing and the written text is considerably more tenuous than in Tony and John's case.

Derek's text (14-17 year olds) illustrates a more complex kind of male gender narrative with physique, sports, and alcohol consumption being sites for the construction of ways of doing boy in his written text. Thus, having referred to his height, Derek goes on to refer to playing a wide range of sports: his favourites being gaelic football, soccer and hurling. The world he depicts is very much a teenage one shaped by global forces that he saw as influencing young people's dress, hairstyles and sporting activities. He refers to going out to the pub with his friends every week-end for three hours and then on to the disco. Although legally, you need to be 18 to get served alcoholic drink in Ireland, *'most pubs serve 16 year olds without asking for ID'*. In his text there are references to aspects of the global entertainment industry and to his enjoyment of a wide range of music such as *'pop, soul, rock and heavy metal'*. He also refers to watching television and going to the cinema. His text concludes with *'Thanks for Reading'*, implicitly suggesting that an interest in young people's lives cannot be taken for granted (see Anderson, 2001). The back page features 18 signatures (eleven by boys and seven by girls) beneath a quote that he said *'describes how young people feel about life these days'*: *'Reality is an illusion caused by lack of alcohol'*. The implication is that only in an inebriated state can young people appreciate the distorted nature of reality. It is possible that this is simply bravado and macho posturing. However, at the heart of both the written text and the back page is a gendered account of 'doing man'-one that draws on both local and global elements, with the reflexive element being suggestive of individualization.

Jim's text (14-17 year olds) involved a subtle problematising of alcohol and drugs as sites for the construction of doing boy- with music being seen as an alternate site. His written text referred to his place of residence and school year, as well as referring to

global aspects of the entertainment industry (describing himself as a '*great fan*' of rock bands such as the Manic Street Preachers) and referring to global political issues. Alcohol and drugs were seen as problematic sites for the construction of ways of doing boy: '*Life for teenagers in Ireland is very pressurised as far as Alcohol and Drugs*'. For him, music was both an escape and a possible future career. He used the back page to draw an electric guitar, with a line of a lyric that he identified as coming from the Manic Street Preachers: '*The aim of design is to define space*'. One could suggest that this line captures the dilemma of contemporary Irish cultural existence: cultural ambiguity after decades of authoritarianism leading to a lack of clear purpose and identity. Arguably for him, music was an alternative site. Both the written text and the back page included global elements and the global seemed to be a way of escaping from difficult international and national realities: the back page focussing on what one could regard as this escapist element.

In each of these cases the written text described various sites for doing boy. In some cases (such as Tony and John) the written text revolved around football and the back page clearly illustrated this. In other cases both the narrative and the relationship with the back page was more subtle. Thus, for example, in the case of Andy, the narrative included elements of boundary crossing, and the back page depicted a male site and so in this sense the written text related to the back page. Derek and Jim's texts were even more nuanced and presented reflexive narratives drawing on global and local elements, which included ways of doing boy.

### ***Doing Girl***

In these texts the underlying narrative is also a gendered one and the back page is broadly related to the written text. In some cases they draw on global elements, while in other cases the texts and the drawings/lyrics feature relationships as a key site for doing girl. There is a relationship between the text and the back page- with the underlying theme related to sites for the construction of ways of doing girl.

Both the written text and back page in the case of Ciara (10-12 year olds) and Lorraine (14-17 year olds) were characterised by an explicit focus on global elements as sites for the construction of ways of doing girl drawn largely from the global entertainment industry, with some evidence of boundary crossing. Thus, Ciara, having referred to her age and school, her best friend and favourite school subjects, went on to focus on global entertainment, identifying her favourite pop bands (including *Steps*, *the Venga boys*, *the Spice Girls*) and her favourite TV programmes (including *Friends*, *The Simpsons* and *South Park*). Unusually, there is no reference to her family in her text. As she saw it, role models '*these days*' were the Spice Girls and '*she wanted to be a pop star herself*.' There is a suggestion of boundary crossing both in her reference to her own alternative career ('*to be the first person to walk on Mars*': Rygaard, 2003) and in her reference to *The Simpsons* as one of her favourite TV programmes. The back page reflected elements of the global content of the written text in its drawing of the Spice Girls and characters from the TV Programme South Park (INSERT FIGURE 8.2).

Lorraine's written text (14-17 year olds) was broadly similar. Thus, having referred to her age, school year and location, her parents' occupations and family composition she focused on global entertainment and global technology, referring to her favourite pop groups and her favourite television programmes (US teen TV including *Friends*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Ally Mc Beal*). Other global elements included '*wanting to travel the world*' and to '*live in Australia when I am older*'. Her back page consisted of a romantic lyric (*Perfect Moment*) by Martina Mc Cutcheon. Thus, in her case the influence of the global was largely through the medium of global entertainment and technology, with the romantic lyric on the back page being a stereotypical site for doing girl. However her career aspiration mirrored her mother's job (nursing) and suggested that this was also a (more traditional) site for doing girl. Her hobbies included 'horse-riding, walking, listening to music, hurling and football' - the latter two indicating boundary crossing. Overall however as in Ciara's text, global elements were important sites for the construction of ways of doing girl and these were reflected in the romantic pop lyric on the back page.

Julia's (10-12 year olds) written text included references to global elements in constructing a narrative of ways of doing girl and in boundary crossing. Her written text refers to her age, her family and her best friend. Her agency was reflected in her love of singing and dancing, speech and drama, hip hop, choir, playing the recorder and the keyboard: her dream being to become a singer. Her favourite song is by *Britney Spears* and she wants to meet the band *Five*. She refers to playing various games including volleyball, football, handball, basketball, skipping and describes her life as *'quite simple'*. Her global awareness was reflected in references to global entertainment (her favourite films); and her hope that: *'by the year 2099... ... world hunger will die out and wars will stop and people will be willing to offer anything they had to the poor'*. There was evidence in her text of her awareness of challenges to gender stereotyping: *'I think my life is fair, my friend Kerrie does'nt Because girls cant play international football she says she will change it one day'*. One could suggest that this was part of a more general questioning of authority since she describes the teachers as *'Sometimes Mean'*. The back page consists of a drawing of a girl with earrings, carefully made up with eye shadow, mascara and lipstick, in a dress with thin straps with a big heart drawn on the front (INSERT FIGURE 8.3). It seems possible to see this as a stereotypically female depiction of women as sexy and caring within a socio-cultural context where the definition of womanhood continues to involve a servicing and nurturing role for women (O'Connor, 1998a; Jagger, 2002; Skeggs 1997). There was no reference to fashion or kindness or compassion in the written text although her drawing suggested an endorsement of a stereotypical image of womanhood, one which can be seen as implied by her rejection of her friend Kerrie's challenging of gender stereotypes. Hence the back page was seen as loosely related to the written text.

Mary's (14-17 years) written text was different in some ways insofar as it was a social commentary that revolved around *'Fashion! Looks! Labels!'* which *'play an important part in my life and in the life of those around'*. The tenor of both the



written text and the back page was such as to suggest that gender was the dominant theme. She identified her favourite clothes, her make up and her hairstyle. She saw a global concern with the body as critical in defining identity and in affecting other's evaluation of us '*We're all moulded to look like a model because we know that the first thing we notice about someone is their looks*'. Her reference to global elements included the latest labels. The content of her back page consisted of what were described as 'chat up lines': suggesting a sexual relationship ('*first ruffle the person's hair and say: I just wanted to see what you looked like in the morning*'); a more broadly romantic one ('*if I could rearrange the alphabet I'd put I and U together*'); and one implicitly suggesting male power ('*Your father stole the stars and put them in your eyes*'). The back page thus included elements that were not in the written text and, unlike it, included no global elements. However when taken together, the written text and the back page can be seen as loosely related in that they are both part of a female gender narrative involving related sites for the construction of ways of doing girl: the back page with its 'chat up lines' being more overtly sexual than the fashion and looks which are the focus of the written text.

Caring and relationships have been widely seen as sites for the construction of ways of doing girl (Jagger 2002; Lodge and Flynn, 2001). Cara's (14-17 year olds) written text reflected and reinforced ways of doing girl which were entirely relational and were resonant of those classic relational orientations identified by Baker Miller (1986) as key to many women's concept of their selves. Thus, her text opened by saying that she was a Transition Year student and that she had written a poem about how she feels: '*I love to be loved and I hate anger and don't understand how people fight all the time*'. Her only references to structural embeddedness involved those that were woven into this theme. Thus she wrote about the loss of her father at four years of age: '*the saddest thing that ever happen to me*'. He died on her parent's anniversary a day that '*is a very sad day in my house*'. Her younger brother was only six months at the time and '*we tell him a lot of story's about my Dad and he is quite happy with that*'. The text concludes by referring to the support that she has derived from good friends '*who are always there when I need them*'. The back page consisted of a poem

she wrote herself about '*the love, the friendship*' that she has received in one relationship. There were no references to global elements in the written text or on the back pages. Rather both entirely revolved around references to attachments- this theme being picked up in the poem on the back page.

Overall then these texts presented a gendered account of doing girl. In some cases (such as Ciara and Lorraine) global elements were used, with the back page illustrating the content of the written text. In other cases (such as Julia and Mary) although global elements were used in the text, the underlying narrative reflected in the back page, featuring relationships as a key site for doing girl. In Cara's text, there were no global elements in the written text or on the back page. Rather both the back page and the written texts revolved entirely around attachments. Overall in these texts other than in references to boundary crossing at an occupational level (wanting to be an astronaut) and in terms of sports (playing football) it was difficult to disentangle the extent to which such gendered accounts reflected individualization or stereotypical gendered scripts.

### **Drawings/Lyrics related to the text but illustrating other themes**

The distinguishing feature of those in this type was that the dominant narrative was not about ways of doing boy/girl (although in some cases this was a meta narrative). In some cases the drawings/lyrics added considerably to the information provided by the written text and so illustrated the kind of contribution that could be made by this creative element and the 'added value' it could provide.

In Celia's (14-17 year olds) text the underlying narrative was about stress. In the text she agonised about where to start her story; about how many friends she had –and how many most people really have anyway; about whether she should list the names of all her relatives; whether she should start again, and then decides that she would not do so because she cannot (see Chapter 6). The back page consisted of a drawing of a global icon -Stressed Eric, a cartoon figure on TV, although the written text included no reference to TV at all. However it seems plausible to suggest that Celia

identified with Stressed Eric and was using him as a kind of code for describing her own underlying feelings of anxious reflexivity –an emotion which was more likely to be ‘owned’ by girls than boys in Ireland at this time (Cleary, 2005). Hence one might suggest that there was an underlying relationship between the written text and the back page. The tenor of her text suggests that she is reflexively aware of her emotional state. Neither the written text nor the back page refer to the construction of ways of doing girl. Indeed this narrative is arguably more about stress than about ways of doing girl.

In some cases global consumerism was particularly salient (Miles, 2000; Miles et al, 1998). Thus, Fionnuala’s (14-17 year olds) written text began by referring to her school year, date of birth, family position and spatial location. She loved going out with her friends to discos and dancing to all the latest music. Fionnuala *‘would love to travel the world’ ‘maybe even live abroad. I would like to live and work in America for a year or two.’* She referred to aspects of global technology and consumerism- including mobile phones and computers. The back page was a photocopied collage of what she called *‘Some Stars of the 90s’* and included photos of pop stars surrounded by material objects such as Nokia mobile phones, Nike Air Zoom runners (priced at E99.99), Compact Discs, and six hairdryers (brand names visible on several of them: INSERT FIGURE 8.4). This could be seen as a social documentary on young people’s material culture in the 1990s and/or as a record of the material cultural artefacts in her own life. It reflected and illustrated the global themes in the main text (Miles, 2000; Miles et al, 1998).

Amy’s text (10-12 year olds) focussed on friends and family. She referred to the meaning of these relationships to her: she *‘looks up to them’*; tells them her secrets; loves them; they help each other out- lend money to each other *‘but we always pay back each other’*. The parental relationship exemplifies these qualities to a heightened and a-symmetrical degree- with them taking care of her; taking her on holidays; giving her money if she needs it, buying her *‘clothes, tracksuits runners’*. She

specifically refers to her siblings: *'I help my brother Tim and my sister Jane we all help each other'*. The web of kindness extends beyond family and friends to include a local dimension: *'All our neighbours are very nice to us'*. She repeats twice that she 'loves' living in the (named) local area: *'There are no fights or arguments'* and there are *'loads of kids'* to play with near her house. There was only one reference to a global element: *'I want to live in Lanzarote for the air 2000 but there is no chance'*. The back page featured a drawing of her (named) brother and sister with Nike symbols on their runners and on her brothers' top (INSERT FIGURE 8.5). There was no reference in the written text to brand names or labels while the drawing on the back page indicated that such labels had become part of the idiom of her perception of her siblings (see Pole, 2005 for a discussion of labels as cultural signifiers).

The local as well as the global also featured in Kieran's (10-12 year olds) written text. It referred to his age, place of residence, school address, his family and his parents' occupations. He mentions his friends' names and says that on Saturday they go to Supermacs or *'hang around the town'*. The latter suggested a local element, which was made explicit in his references to his town as *'a very historic town because it has a castle that looks like a round tower'*. The local as a site for the construction of ways of doing boy was implicit in his reference to supporting his county in hurling (his own hobbies including hurling, soccer and gaelic football). The global elements in the written text included a reference to global technology (playing with his computer and watching TV); to the global entertainment industry (his favourite bands; with *Manchester United* being his favourite soccer team); global and local elements being reflected in his dream *'to play soccer for Manchester United and the Republic of Ireland'*. There are also global political elements, including a hope for world peace and an end to world starvation. The text concludes by re-stating his age, class and the name of his school. There is no reference in the written text to a school crest or to any school activities. However, the back page consisted of a careful drawing of his school crest featuring the local castle in the centre, with the name of the school on the top and its location in Irish underneath. This suggested a creative recognition of the visual

relationship between the two local elements (the school and the castle) and/or the symbolic importance of the school itself. Thus the written text and the back page could be seen as implicitly suggesting a narrative rooted in the local area.

Donald's text (14-17 year olds) was similar in that the back page included elements that were not mentioned in the written text. That text referred to his date of birth, place of residence, school and family composition. He describes Ireland's economic wealth; sporting successes (unusually for a boy, referring to women athletes: Sonia O'Sullivan and Michelle Smith); and the existence of peace in the north- with the hope that *'in your lifetime you can see Ireland United'*. There is evidence of global awareness in his concern with the environment; in his expectation that space travel will be possible in the future and in his references to international travel. The back page consisted simply of a drawing of the Dublin symbol of the Millennium- the Spire. There is no reference to this –or indeed to Dublin- in the written text. The back page echoes the pride in Irishness in the written text but focuses this on Dublin where he lives. One might suggest that Donald's narrative seemed to be rooted in the national/local area.

The main tenor of the written texts was not related to the construction of boy/girl and in all of these cases the back page added to our understanding of the written text, by introducing elements that are not referred to in that text. Thus stress (Celia), consumerism (Fionnuala) and the local/national (Kieran and Donald) were seen as key themes and were reflected in the written text and in the back page.

### **Drawings/Lyrics with no relation to Written Text**

This type included drawings that had no obvious relationship with the written text. The content of these drawings was gendered, in the sense that particular kinds of drawings were more likely to be done by girls than boys. Thus for example, drawings related in a general way to nature (including drawings of a sunrise or a kite over the sea), animals (including but not restricted to their own pets) as well as drawings of specific friends and family were more likely to be done by girls than boys. The

salience of attachment figures in their drawings is compatible with girls greater relational connectedness- a pattern that is only beginning to be visible at 10-12 years as regards references to named friends, best friends and pets, but which is very strong indeed by 14-17 years (O'Connor et al, 2003). However the crucial element was that there was a clear disjunction between the content of the written text and the back page.

Thus, Mary Anne's (10-12 year olds) written text focussed on what she called her life now. The only local elements were the description of her place of residence- a three bedroomed flat on the top floor in the city where she lived with her parents, sister and her dog. Her written text included references to her family and her school. Her agency was reflected in her references to her friends and her after-school activities (which included playing in a pipe band three days a week). She was critical of the amount of homework the teacher gave her and of the man who leads the pipe band: *'Its my favourite hobby only John Cassidy really annoys and gives out to you'*. This is suggestive of a challenging of authority- although her hope that the reader will understand her writing suggests a rather submissive attitude. The text includes no global elements. The back page makes no reference to any elements on the written text. It consists a drawing of a flower under the caption *'Nature is the Future'*. It was impossible to see the relationship of this drawing to the written text.

Michael's (14-17 years old) written text begins by referring to his family and friends. He then referred to his experience of moving to Ireland and his ease in settling down here. He loves sport- particularly football, although he also likes playing rugby, hockey, cricket, GAA and running. He sees the 'greatest achievement' of his life as getting football trials for the Republic of Ireland. He did not get into the team- but says that he *'wasn't that disapointed'* since he knew that if he trained he could make it- implicitly asserting control in that situation. Being a professional footballer is one of his ambitions, as is making lots of money and travelling round the world. The other global element in his written text is his support for Manchester United. Although there is no reference to music, bands or lyrics in his written text, his back page consists of

song lyrics from- *Verve- Bitter Sweet Sympathy*; *Wet, wet, Angel Eyes*; and *Lenny Cravets, Fly away*. This reference to pop lyrics on the back page suggests boundary crossing since pop music is more likely to be referred to in girls than in boys' texts. Its relationship with the content of the written text is not clear.

Amongst the boys, these texts typically included references to global/local elements and to stereotypical ways of doing boy in a context where there was no apparent relationship between the written text and the back page. Overall however doing boy/girl seemed to be a minor theme in these narratives: their distinguishing feature being the absence of any relationship between the written text and the back page.

### **Back Page Blank**

Although our main focus in this chapter is on the relationship between the written text and the back page, it seemed useful to look at the narratives of those who left the back page blank to see if they were similar or different. Amongst the girls, particularly the 14-17 year olds, these were by far the most clearly individualised of the written texts. Thus these texts focussed selectively and exclusively on one particular dimension of their lives (such as Transition Year, school, sports, loss etc). Aileen's (14-17 years) text implicitly revolved around issues related to control and choice in her school. Thus having given her age, she referred to the number of day pupils/boarders, to the timetable, the subjects that could be done at different stages, the school uniform, rules about footwear and behaviour-themes that have occurred in other Irish studies of young people's school experiences (Lynch and Lodge 2002; Lynch, 1989b). Similarly Aileen text (14-17 years) focussed exclusively on gossip and what she saw as the pressure on the person who became the focus of this interest (see Chapter 5). There were no references whatsoever to global elements in these texts, although themes related to choice and control are arguably relevant in a late modern context (Beck, 1992 and 1994; Giddens, 1991 and 1994) and are of course strongly suggestive of individualisation.

Maureen's written text (10-12 years) referred to her place of residence, family composition, age and school. Her global awareness was reflected in her concern for world peace as well as in environmental issues; while her written text was characterised by strong local pride in her town, its historic past and its current facilities. She was critical of the traffic in the area and felt that '*there should be more activities for children and teenagers.*' Her text also included reference to her friends and to her hobbies. The latter included both stereotypical male ones such as soccer as well as more stereotypically female ones including rollerblading, dancing and reading. Her choice of an occupation when she grew up (an accountant or a solicitor) as well as her reference to playing for the local soccer team, suggested boundary crossing—something that she explained in terms of her father's and brother's involvement in the sport. Such boundary crossing was also reflected in her identification of David Beckham and Ryan Giggs as her favourite players. Overall then, the focus on themes related to choice, control and boundary crossing were also strongly suggestive of individualisation.

Amongst the older boys in this category there were occasional references to stereotypical ways of doing boy. Mark (14-17 year olds) began by referring to his age, school, his father and mother's names and the composition of his family. His agency was reflected in his references to his pastimes ('*snooker, reading, watching TV and socialising*'); and his favourite snooker player, his favourite author, snooker club and the nightclub where he socialised with his friends. He was also a fan of soccer: '*My favourite team are Arsenal. In May 1998 we were crowned Premiership and FA Cup champions*'. The use of the word 'we' was very striking, suggesting a very strong identification with this limited global element, which could be seen as a site for the construction of ways of doing boy. The back page was blank.

The 10-12 year olds boy's texts had even fewer indicators of individualisation. Thus, having referred to his age, his family composition, place of residence and school,



Patrick (10-12 years) then went on to refer to different aspects of his life style focusing on his favourite sport (hurling- although he also liked soccer, gaelic football and swimming). He identified his favourite hurler (Joe Deane). One of his ambitions was to play as a senior in an all Ireland Final and his own best achievement was playing in a junior All Ireland Final (although they lost). Global references featured with references to his favourite computer/play station game; to supporting Manchester United and to his favourite soccer player (Roy Keane); as well as brief references to travel and to global political concerns (including a hope for global peace). Football, technology and political concerns were sites for the construction of ways of doing boy. In these cases the cultural motifs appeared to be mostly related to stereotypical male concerns. Since the back page was blank, it was more difficult to assess the balance of global and local elements and to differentiate individualization from stereotypical gendered scripts.

Overall then the girls' texts in this type had more indicators of individualisation (whether as reflected in a focus on one particular aspect of their life or as reflected in boundary crossing). Amongst the boys, the texts of those whose back page was blank were less individualised, and, particularly amongst the 10-12 year olds, were broadly similar to those who used the back page to illustrate the written text. Hence one might speculate that the reasons why they did not use the back page were reflective of a wider attitude to school whereas in the case of the girls they were more likely to reflecting individualisation.

### **Summary**

In this chapter we looked at the written text and back pages together-focussing first on those that were related in some way and illustrated ways of doing boy/girl and then at those where other themes (such as consumerism or stress) were dominant. We then looked at those where there was no relationship between the written text and the back page and finally at those where the back page was blank. Overall, in the boys' written

texts ways of doing boy continued to be generally reflected in a narrow range of themes, with sports in general and football in particular featuring prominently in the written texts and in the drawings on the back page. In an Irish context, football as a site included both global and local elements and, (at least in the latter area) it may come under pressure very soon as a site for doing boy, with the increasing proportion of young women playing football. In the written texts, there were references to other sites, such as gendered occupations, technology and war but these were very much less common. There was limited evidence of boundary crossing in the male narratives and this combined with the stereotypical gendered content made it difficult to identify evidence of individualisation.

It was striking that there was greater variety in the girls' gender narratives. Thus although relationships and fashion were elements in the female gender narrative (see Ging, 2005) there were much less dominant than football was in the boys' male gender narratives. Furthermore, relationships as key elements in girls' gender narratives indicated the points of continuity rather than change in such narratives. There was a suggestions that other themes were emerging, both in the written text and in the back pages (for example, consumerism and stress). The media was seen as facilitating boundary crossing, particularly amongst the girls. Overall it seems possible to conclude that, as suggested by Ging (2005) globalisation supports hegemonic ways of 'doing boy', although it can be used to extend the repertoire of ways of doing girl.

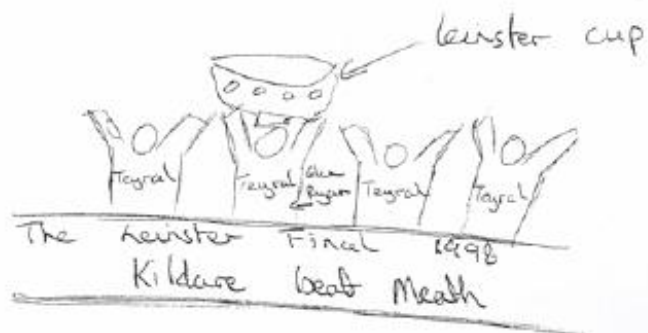
Although Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) suggested that individualisation was particularly fraught for women, in the present study it was the girls' rather than the boys' texts that most strongly suggested individualisation. Those cases where the back page was blank and the girls focussed exclusively on one particular aspect of their lives reflected particularly high levels of individualisation.

In both the boys and the girl's texts, there was also evidence of the ways in which creative elements on the back page could add to our understanding of the written text.

Thus Amy's drawing suggested that global merchandising symbols had become part of the idiom of her perception of her siblings. In Kieran's case considerable ingenuity was used in utilising local symbols. One could suggest that precisely because drawing capitalises on children's skills (whereas the written text is likely to be more constrained by an adult world) it is a peculiarly revealing medium for understanding children-particularly when such drawings are combined with their written texts. Furthermore, the fact that typically, unlike the written texts, the back pages did not include both global and local elements, suggested that they could provide less ambiguous indicators of global/local orientation than that provided by the written text. Furthermore, in those cases where the back pages were blank, it was also difficult to interpret the balance of elements in the written text- thus implicitly highlighting the contribution that drawings can make to our understanding of young people and their lives.

This study has focussed on young people within one small rapidly changing society. However, it seems plausible to suggest that the patterns emerging are unlikely to be peculiar to such contexts. However, further work in such society is necessary to explore this and in particular to provide insights into those cases where the written text had no relationship to the back page.

Figure 8.1



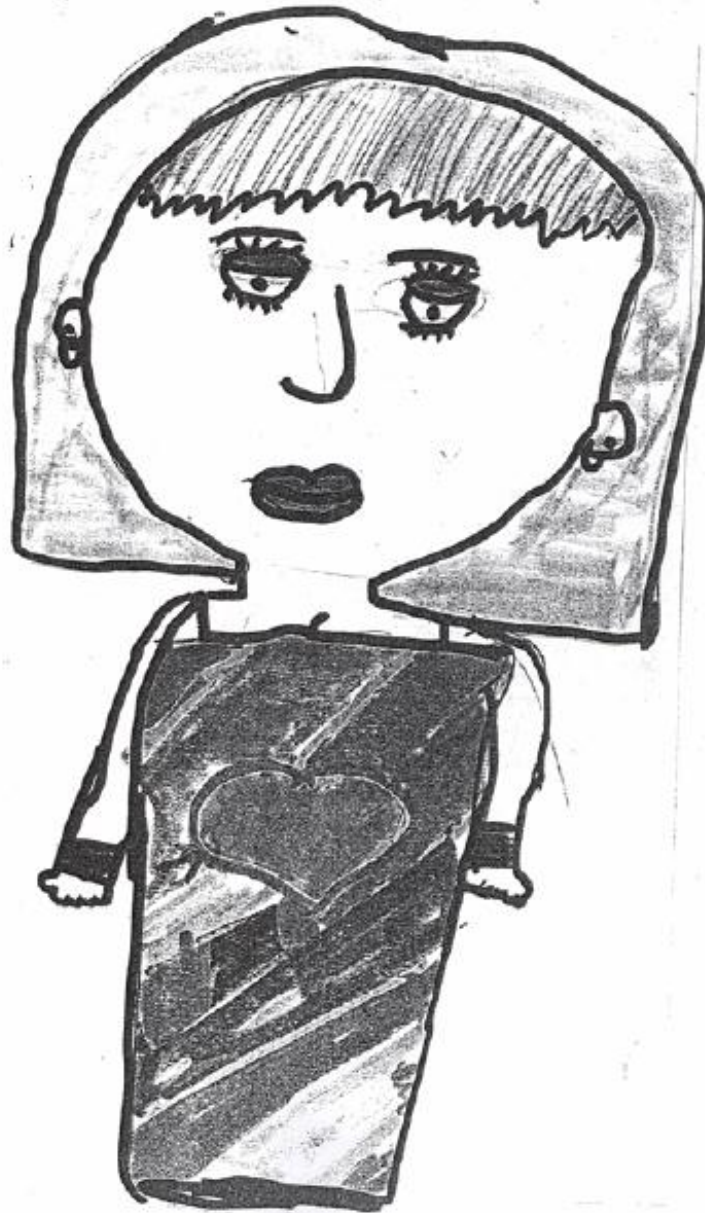
This was a great day in  
my life when Kildare won  
out Leinster for the first  
time in 20 years.

Figure 8.2



Figure 8.3

ONE of MY drawings



**Figure 8.4**



## **Chapter 9: Summary and Conclusions**

### **Introduction**

Ireland has been undergoing very rapid change, particularly over the past ten years. Such change has occurred at many levels- including increasing cultural globalisation and dramatic increases in married women's participation in paid employment. The lives of young people have been affected by these changes, as well as by more long term changes involving rising participation in education; increased participation in part-time paid employment during school careers; changing sexual norms and attitudes and increases in urban and suburban living. In this changing social and cultural context there is a challenge for young people to create a narrative: 'The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent yet continuously revised, biographical narratives' (Giddens, 1991: 5). We know relatively little about the kinds of narratives constructed by young people in such a fast changing social, cultural and economic context that is 'irrevocably and globally networked' (Beck and Beck- Gernsheim 2002: 25) and at least potentially characterised by 'inflated expectations', 'insatiable hunger for new experience, 'decreasing preparedness to obey commands' and an 'ethic of individual self fulfilment and achievement' (op cit. p 26 and 22), the absence of 'a moral anchor' fuelled by 'alcohol and drugs' and 'symptomatic of a kind of nihilistic narcissism' (Inglis, 2006: see Corcoran, 2006: 5). Kuhling and Keohane (2006:40) suggested that depression in one in four Irish men and one in three Irish women, together with high levels of actual and attempted suicide amongst young people reflected 'Ireland's collision culture: an experience of accelerated modernisation and the persistence of older social forms, while higher values and metaphysical ideals are destabilised and uncertain.' Such patterns may not be peculiar to Ireland nor to the present moment: indeed Kuhling and Keohane (2006) see similarities between these features and those characteristic of other periods of rapid social and cultural change elsewhere.



Such ideas although interesting are highly speculative. In an attempt to look in a more systematic way at young people's reflexive narratives about themselves in a fast changing societal context, this study explored accounts given by Irish young people. Their modes of reflexivity (O'Connor, 2006b) included those involving relationships, discourses about time and space, life styles and life plans as well as those involving a search for authenticity; a reference to critical moments; a concern with internal emotional states and references to role models (Giddens, 1991, 1992 and 1994; Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). We also looked at those modes that suggested less reflexivity, such as references to family and to positional identities (Bauman, 1997; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) as well as those where the young people sidestepped references to their own identity altogether and provided social commentaries on society. In exploring these young people's narratives, we focused particularly on the absence/presence of gender differentiated trends, drawing on what Evans (1995: 91) called a 'weak cultural feminist tradition' much of it stimulated by Gilligan's classic (1982) and widely critiqued work (see Stone 1996). This non-essentialist focus on women's difference has been complimented by work on masculinities, particularly hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995a) which has acted 'as a normative and indeed culturally specific standard', 'against which behaviours and identities can be evaluated' (Hearn, 1996: 203).

The texts that were the basis of the study were written by a national sample of young people in Fifth Class in First Level (typically aged 10-12 years) and in Transition Year in Second Level (typically aged 14-17 years) in a school context in response to an invitation to describe 'themselves and the Ireland they inhabit' so as 'to provide a national data base' and 'an invaluable archive'. The young people were encouraged to use the back pages creatively for drawings, poems, songs and lyrics. The data in this study consisted of 4,100 pages of text (and their back pages) drawn in a stratified random sample from the total 33,828 texts. The method of analysis of this data was both quantitative and qualitative. At a quantitative level, the 4,100 sheets were coded on a range of variables including family, friends, school, descriptions of self, hobbies and activities, roots, the future and current affairs. In addition, further analyses were

undertaken of sub-samples of these texts, including a focus on the relationship between the content of the written text and of the back page. The qualitative analysis consisted of a thematic analysis of a number of sub-samples, initially in terms of the concepts identified in the quantitative analysis, and then later extended to include themes identified inductively and/or derived from the literature. The texts have been presented as they were written without spellings or punctuation being corrected. As such they raise educational issues. For the purposes of this book however what is striking is these young people's desire to communicate and, particularly amongst the 14-17 year olds, the gentle humour and irony with which they comment on the world and their own place in it.

Since the data was written in a school context, the study is limited in several ways. Firstly in such a context there is a risk of collective planning –and there were suggestions that this occurred amongst some of the younger children. Furthermore, the influence of the school setting or perceived reader on the texts cannot be ascertained although the directions to schools specifically indicated that no selection was to be made on the basis of quality or appropriateness. Secondly, the contributors were not required to give personal information other than their names and their school year: hence limiting independent variables. Thirdly, it is impossible to know to what extent these texts reflect normative ideas about the appropriateness of particular kinds of identities in childhood and adolescence although it seems possible that they may do so, at least to some extent. Furthermore, as the method was entirely document based, the young people were not asked why they included/excluded particular elements. Hence, although the data is based on children's texts, the interpretation of these texts is from an adult perspective.

### **Relationships with Family and Friends**

As one might expect the overwhelming majority of the young people at both ages referred to their family thus indicating a strong sense of ascriptive social embeddedness. This varied by age with the 10-12 year olds being more likely than the 14-17 year olds to refer to nuclear and extended families- a pattern that might reflect

greater variation in the content of the 14-17 year olds texts and/or greater individualization in their narratives. Boys, the 14-17 year olds in particular, were less likely than girls of the same age to refer to family and less likely to define family to include extended family, prompting one to suggest that a relational discourse (even an ascribed one) was less compatible with ways of 'doing boy' than 'doing girl'

Giddens (1991) saw freely chosen friends as important for the reflexive project of the self. The majority of the young people in this study referred to such friends - so that clearly what Bjerrum Nielsen (2004) called 'relational individualism' was a feature in their accounts. Furthermore, although earlier work on male adults showed that men were likely to have more extensive ties than women (see O'Connor 2002/1992) it was the girls who referred to more extensive networks. Thus, 39 per cent of the 14-17 year old boys referred to at least two friends as compared with 72 per cent of the girls of that age. Hence one might suggest that relational individualism was more characteristic of these girls' texts. This did not seem to be a culturally specific pattern since similar trends as regards girl's extensive friendship networks also emerged in Griffin's (1985) classic study of working class young women in the UK.

Best friends can be regarded as individualised relationships par excellence (see O'Connor, 2002/1992) reflecting and reinforcing young people's individual uniqueness. In these terms there were surprisingly low levels of individualisation amongst these young people. Thus only 17 per cent of the 14-17 year old girls and four per cent of the 14-17 year old boys referred to such relationships. Such trends may reflect methodological factors. In so far as they do not, further work might well be carried out to explore the reasons for such low levels of references to best friends amongst the 14-17 year olds and the consequences of this. In particular one might also look at the social and cultural context associated with the paucity of references to such ties amongst the 14-17 year olds- including the issue of the cultural validation of such

relationships and the resources, including time, to create and maintain them (O'Connor, 2002/1992; Lynch 1989b).

Fun relationships with boys were the closest approximation to pure relationships in Giddens' (1991) terms, although there was no evidence that they were intimate. On the other hand, the girls' best friends were particularly likely to be confidants. The importance of confidants can of course be overstated- representing as it does a kind of feminisation of love (Cancian, 1986). However particularly in adolescence, it seems plausible to suggest that confidants are important. Other work has suggested that same-sex friendships between the girls were affected by the increasing importance of heterosexual relationships (see Thorne, 1993). There was no evidence of this in the texts: indeed if anything the evidence was in the opposite direction. Thus, arguably empowered by high levels of education and academic achievements, by a tradition of emotionally strong female role models in the family, and by the weakening of hegemonic ways of doing boy, girls did not define themselves implicitly or explicitly as subordinate (thus effectively nullifying any eroticisation of subordination in such relationships). Nevertheless, it was surprising that although the majority of the young women referred to friends, only 17 per cent referred to best friends.

Gender differences as regards references to friends in general, and best friends in particular, were much smaller amongst the 10-12 year olds. Thus there was virtually no difference between the girls and boys of this age as regards references to the number of friends, although the girls were more likely to refer to a best friend. Thus almost two fifths of the 10-12 year old girls referred to a best friend as did a quarter of the boys. It is not clear why, in the absence of the prioritization of heterosexual relationships, the proportion of 14-17 year old girls referring to such relationships was much lower than the proportion of 10-12 year old girls. There was a suggestion that same sex friendships could be seen as in some way suspect sexually and this may account for this trend, although other work is clearly needed in this area. Future work might also explore the extent to which younger boys felt themselves to be less

exposed than their older counterparts to homophobic pressures as regards identifying what are overwhelmingly same sex relationships as best friends.

The consistency in the gender differences in references to friendships and to family suggests that references to relationships of any kind were more compatible with doing girl than doing boy, particularly amongst the 14-17 year olds, with the girls being consistently more likely to reflexively construct their identity in terms of relational discourses with family and friends. Thus a continuum of relational reflexivity can be identified: with 10-12 year old girls being at one end of the continuum and 14-17 year old boys being at the other end. Obviously the possibility that this is a methodological artefact, reflecting for example, the greater diversity in the 14-17 year old texts cannot be eliminated. It would be interesting to explore the extent to which such patterns exist in other societies where there is a weaker tradition of women's emotional power within the family.

## **Work**

Because the focus of this study was on young people, work was defined very broadly indeed to include school attendance as well as part-time work in the paid employment area and helping out in the home, farm and family business. Boys and girls referred to school as a taken-for-granted experience. As in other studies, relationships with peers were an important feature of the school setting (see Mizen et al, 2000; Mayall, 2001). Indeed, particularly for the older girls, making and maintaining friendships was one of the principal reasons for coming to school- since school was seen as a source of friendship and an occasion to meet and interact with friends. For the boys, it was a site of sporting activities, and an arena where they could demonstrate their competence (or have their incompetence revealed). Given such a focus, it is arguably not coincidental that it is boys who are most likely to leave school early.

In Qvortrup's typology (1991), wage work, paid family work and unpaid work done in the home were also identified as types of children's work. Paradoxically their references to a variety of such work experiences seemed to be largely positive. Paid

employment was valued as a source of money and independence. In other cases work was defined as 'helping out' within the context of a supportive relationship and thus exempted from the normal employee expectation of payment (although some monetary recognition might be given). It was noticeable that relationships were the context for undertaking all but paid work, thus challenging the differentiation between work and love.

### **Discourses involving Time**

Giddens (1991:33) noted that in traditional cultures transitions in individual lives were often characterised by rites of passage as an individual moved along a clearly marked path from adolescence to adulthood, whereas nowadays 'the altered self has to be explored and constructed as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change'. It has been widely argued that an important aspect of individualisation is the disembedding of the life course and the substitution of a choice biography for a standard biography, with life plans becoming 'the substantial content of the reflexively organised trajectory of the self' (Giddens, 1991: 85; see also Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Berger et al 1974).

There has been some argument about whether young people in late modern societies have ambitions and make plans for their future (Anderson et al, 2005; Brannen and Nilsen, 2002: 52). However the apparent differences in these studies ultimately reflected differences in methodology and terminology (Brannen and Nilsen, 2006). Using Brannen and Nilsen's (2002) framework differentiating between living in the present; referring to a contingent future and anticipating a predictable future, we looked at young people's discourses around time in the present study. It was striking that the 14-17 year old boys and girls were equally likely to take refuge from a daunting future in a focus on an extended present. Amongst the girls, fear and anxiety was part of this present orientation, whereas in the case of the boys, the focus was more on pleasure, with both boys and girls wanting to avoid commitments. A

contingent model of the future, where the stress was on negotiating that future was also evident amongst the 14-17 year old girls who had high expectations as regards education and participation in paid employment. For them it was relationships that were contingent and very much in the realm of hopes and dreams. The 10-12 year olds, both boys and girls, were most likely to anticipate a predictable future, and to refer to their plans and ambitions in relation to that future- mapping out that future within a standardised, more or less linear life course involving education travel and paid employment, with (occasional) references to relationships and children. Such patterns can be seen as marking a substantial cultural change, since in the lifetime of many of their mothers, paid work effectively ceased on marriage (under legal pressure in a number of occupations up to 1973 and widespread social pressure until the 1990s: O'Connor, 1998a). Furthermore although the 10-12 year olds had life plans, these were rather different to the highly individualised ones that one might expect to be constructed in the light of theorizing in the area.

Amongst both boys and girls, particularly those aged 10-12 years old, there was evidence of a sense of time that was deeper than the present moment, with references being made to their own life course- and in particular to their birth and anticipated death; occasionally to their sense of themselves as part of a line that was rooted in the past and potentially extended forward to their descendants; and also occasionally to their sense of themselves as part of an age cohort. None of these discourses suggested a fragile disconnected individualised self. Furthermore, the future was very rarely envisaged by either age group in terms of scientific or technological innovations- although there were occasional references to the part that could be played by robots in dealing with tensions created by conflicting gendered expectations as regards gender roles (a tension that was ignored by both boys and girls in other contexts): *'Are cyborg wives cheap and efficient?'*(Jim, Transition Year, Second Level).

Overall then, it is not clear to what extent the different discourses amongst the 10-12 and 14-17 year olds reflect developmental patterns and/or the macro structural economic and cultural environment in which they grew up: the 14-17 year olds having experienced a considerably more troubled economic upbringing in their early years in the economically depressed 1980s than the 10-12 year olds in the economically buoyant 1990s.

### **Spatial Discourses: The Global and The Local**

Giddens (1991:146) argued that in late modernity, the local area declined in importance: place 'becomes thoroughly penetrated by disembedding mechanisms'. However it has been increasingly recognised that the local and the global are not mutually exclusive polarities. Indeed Robertson (1995:30) suggested that 'globalisation has involved the reconstruction of 'home', 'community' and 'locality'' –using the phrase 'glocalisation' to refer to this new phenomenon'.

The texts in the present study strongly suggested that these young people located themselves very much in a local area. Thus, almost two thirds of the total sample referred to such an area. There was little or no difference in this case between boys and girls, although the 10-12 year olds were most likely to include local elements in their written texts - arguably reflecting the narrower spatial boundaries in their lives (Leonard, 2005). However, the meaning and definition of the local area varied by age. For some of the 14-17 year olds, the relevant geographical area was wider than the local area and in some cases embraced the national. For some of the 10-12 year olds, the meaning of the local area lay in its importance as a focus of team based recreation and identity, for others it was its historical artefacts or amenities, its natural beauty or the opportunities the local area presented for unstructured play activities that were important. Indeed, some of the references to the latter by both age groups and sexes evoked a very much simpler life style that surprisingly did not seem to be extinct. Both age groups also referred to the existence and the importance of community ties.



The majority of the written texts also included global elements, particularly but not exclusively those related to the global entertainment, consumer culture and global technology. Once again the 10-12 year olds were most likely to include them and there was little gender difference in such references at that age. There was little evidence of global risk consciousness as reflected in concerns about ecological disasters, extinction of species or global warming. In so far as such references existed, they were most likely to occur in the texts of the 14-17 year old boys, where a sense of impotent global despair particularly as regards environmental issues, although rare, was striking. There was also some evidence of utopian wishes for an improved life for humanity in both age groups, reflected in a desire for an end to war, racism and inequality.

Simplistic assumptions that the global had transcended the local were not supported by this study. Rather the co-existence of global and local elements in these young people's written texts was very much a reality. Thus, in both age groups and across genders, the global and the local were enmeshed so that their life styles were best characterised as locally embedded within a global world in ways that reflected and reinforced gendered differences. Indeed, the permeability of the global and the local was reflected in the fact that some discourses reflected globalised processes, such as the 'tourist gaze' (Bauman 1997). The taken for granted character of such penetration offered some support for the idea that increasingly: 'social life cannot be seen as firmly located in particular places with clear boundaries' (Savage et al, 2005:1).

### **Other Aspects of Narratives of the Self**

The present study also looked at other indicators that have been highlighted by the theorists of post modernity (Giddens, 1991, 1992 and 1994; Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) including a search for authenticity, references to critical moments, to emotional states and to role models. Gender variation occurred in some of these modes of reflexivity. Thus for example, references to a search for authenticity was most likely to occur amongst the 14-17 year old girls. Furthermore, although both

boys and girls referred to critical moments, the content of these varied. Thus, amongst the boys they revolved around attempts to establish hierarchical dominance mainly through football, while amongst the girls they revolved around connectedness. Such trends are compatible with those emerging in the chapter on relationships with family and friends (Chapter 3) and life styles (Chapter 7). They have also been reflected in a wide variety of international research stemming from Gilligan's (1982) work.

Cultures have traditionally provided individuals with a set of social categories that they can use to classify themselves (Goffman, 1968; Turner 1987). It has been argued that in a late modern society, there is a weakening of such collective identities (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991) with the suggestion that 'women have to abandon their older 'fixed' identities in a more thorough going way than men' (Giddens, 1991: 106). It was striking that with the exception of age (which was almost universally referred to), there were relatively few references to such positional identities by these young people. Furthermore despite the underlying importance of gender in mapping their narratives, there were only occasional references to gender as a positional identity.

Giddens (1991:57) has stressed that the self is embodied and that 'routine control of the body is integral to the very nature both of agency and of being accepted (trusted) by others as competent'. In this context the scarcity of references to the body by both age groups was striking. Again, it is possible that this is a methodological artefact reflecting the classroom situation in which these texts were written. Alternatively however it seems plausible to suggest that in a society which has been traditionally characterised by ambivalence about the body, and where the rapidity of change has disrupted feelings of ontological security 'disembodiment is an attempt to transcend dangers and be safe' although, paradoxically the price of that disembodiment is anxiety (Giddens, 1991: 59). However, references to internal emotional states, which occurred amongst both boys and girls and at both ages, were for the most part very positive. References to negative emotional states, although rare, were most likely to

be made by the 14-17 year old boys. Thus it seems plausible to suggest that the challenge of the reflexive project of the self is one that girls are in some ways facing more effectively than boys.

In a context where the self is a reflexive project for which the individual is responsible and where: 'We are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves' (Giddens, 1991:75) one might anticipate references to refer to role models- people whom we aspire to be like or who implicitly suggest ways to 'make' ourselves. In fact however, the majority of the young people did not explicitly refer to role models. Those that were identified were drawn mostly from the public area and included both heroes (who were chosen for working on others behalf) and celebrities (who were chosen because of their possessions, fame or success). Cross gender identification by girls of such role models was seen as unproblematic. It also implicitly suggested that gender as such was not salient in these young women's discursive sense of themselves. Cross gender identification by the boys was much rarer –arguably reflecting the perceived higher status of maleness (a perception supported by studies showing that boys get higher levels of pocket money in the home; and that, as new graduates, they get higher salaries and benefits than their female counterparts (McCoy and Smith, 2004; and Russell et al, 2005 respectively).

Public narratives that were commentaries on the present for future generations were also seen as implicitly suggesting a non-reflexive transcending of the self. It was striking that boys were most likely to present themselves as authoritative interpreters of a wide range of economic, political, social and cultural phenomena for future generations, arguably reflecting and reinforcing their hegemonic position. The only area where girls provided such social commentaries were those relating to fashion- a stereotypically gendered concern and one that did not challenge patriarchal hegemony. Hence one might suggest that boys' non-reflexivity could be seen as seen as in effect a way of perpetuating their authoritative position.

## **Life Styles**

For Giddens (1991: 5) 'In modern social life, the notion of lifestyle takes on a particular significance' as 'individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options'. They are he suggests 'routinised practices...but the routines followed are reflexively open to change in the light of the mobile nature of self identity'. They involve 'decisions not only about how to act but who to be' (Giddens, 1991:81). They are a context within which we can explore ways of doing boy/girl.

There were highly gender-differentiated patterns as regards boys and girls life styles in the areas of sports and media and culturally related activities. Thus participating in and watching team based, physical contact sports was more likely to be referred to by boys than girls. Fahey et al's (2005) study also documented the disproportionate encouragement of such activities by the educational system and voluntary organisations-arguably reflecting and reinforcing a male dominated agenda. Gender differentiated trends were also evident in the area of media and cultural activities (trends which also emerged in De Roiste and Dinneen's 2005 study): with the boys in the present study being most likely to refer to computer related activities and the girls to teen TV and chart music (although the latter were also more likely to refer to a range of traditional cultural influences, such as reading and playing music- patterns that have also emerged in other studies). Interestingly however there were no gender differences as regards risk taking life styles amongst the 14-17 year olds- a pattern that one might speculate also reflects the implicit societal valorisation of stereotypically male life styles and their adoption by teenage girls. In this context rising levels of binge drinking amongst young women as well as young men, and similar levels of attempted suicide are salutary (ESPAD 2004 and HBSC, 2003).

References to sports and to media related and cultural activities were less likely to occur in the 14-17 year olds texts than in the 10-12 year olds. This may reflect methodological factors (such as the greater variety in the content of the 14-17 year

olds texts). Nevertheless similar gendered trends emerged with the boys being most likely to refer to computer related activities; to playing physical contact team based sports and to following international sports. The 14-17 year old girls' life styles typically involved listening to music, watching TV, seeing friends, with some references to participation in non-team based activities such as swimming; and occasional references to traditional cultural activities. Both boys and girls referred to going to discos/clubs, and the difficulties of getting admission to them given their age.

It is important to stress that such trends are seen as cultural constructions, rather than as essentialist realities. Furthermore, there were areas where their construction of the self did not seem to be gendered. Firstly, references to part-time jobs, clothes, consumption of alcohol etc were not gender differentiated. This suggests that aspects of the consumer society are eroding traditional gender differences since for example, in the past fashion has arguably been a more important element in women's than in men's construct of self, while paid employment and alcoholic consumption were arguably more important in mens'.

Overall then, there was greater variety in the girls' gender narratives involving their life styles. Thus although relationships, romance, fashion and performance (Ging, 2005) were seen as elements in such female gender narratives, in the present study they were much less dominant than football was in the boys' narratives Overall then, it seems possible to conclude that, globalisation supports limited cultural constructions of ways of doing boy. However global elements can be used to extend cultural constructions of ways of doing girl.

### **Drawings/Lyrics and Written Texts**

One could suggest that precisely because drawing capitalises on children's skills (whereas the written text is likely to be more constrained by an adult world) it is a peculiarly revealing medium for understanding children. Indeed the fact that typically, unlike the written texts, drawings did not include both global and local elements,

might suggest that they provided less ambiguous indicators of global/local orientation than that provided by the written text. However, it was impossible to choose between the written texts and such creative elements in terms of their validity, illustrating the difficulties involved in triangulation (Deacon et al, 1998; Bryman, 1992).

The visual images of the local on the back pages included both local historical and natural sites; tourist related images such as Guinness and shamrocks, as well as elements related to a more nationalist conception involving flags, coins and maps. The global visual images on the back pages included drawings of international soccer players; dream teams, pop stars or technological phenomena, such as mobile phones, computers and ghetto blasters-with characters from films or TV programmes featuring amongst the 10-12 year olds. Perhaps not surprisingly, in view of the increasingly visual nature of the global, such images were more common than the local ones on the back pages.

The relationship between the visual images and the written text in some cases showed the ways in which the creative elements on the back page added to our understanding of the written text. Thus Amy's drawing suggested that global merchandising symbols had become part of the idiom of her perception of her siblings. In Kieran's case considerable ingenuity was shown in utilising local symbols. Those texts where the back page was broadly related to the written text illustrated the visual prioritising of sites for doing boy/girl- with the range of the former being much narrower than the latter. Furthermore, in the case of doing girl, it was striking that although some of the back pages used global images from the mass media, others showed more continuity with traditional female narratives involving attachments. In other cases the back pages, although broadly related to the written text mainly featured other themes (such as consumerism or stress). However, the back pages did for the most part make an important contribution to understanding the nuances in the written text, although the whole area of the relationship between drawings and written texts obviously merits further attention.

## **Conclusions**

At the heart of this study lies the question of whether and to what extent the self has become a reflexive project amongst young people focussing on one fast changing societal context. There are obvious limitations to the study, deriving not only from the nature of the data but also from the fact that there is no baseline study with which this one can be compared, so that it is impossible to disentangle cohort from age effects. Furthermore, cross-cultural comparisons are difficult since there are very few comparable databases. Finally, in this study we are dealing with accounts, which may to a greater or lesser extent reflect these young people's actual behaviour.

Within the context of these limitations, it seems possible to conclude that in one sense the self has become a reflexive project insofar as overwhelmingly, with the exception of age, these young people did not use positional identities to define who they were. Thus even amongst the 10-12 year olds the 'self has to be explored and constructed as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change' (Giddens, 1991:33). However in constructing it, ascribed relationships with family were crucially important for both age groups, and these relationships did not seem to be perceived as 'pure relationships' in Giddens' (1991) sense. Furthermore references to individualised relationships such as best friendships which Giddens saw as crucially important, were rare in these young people's accounts-and particularly so amongst the 14-17 year olds. The virtual absence of references by boys to such ties is not surprising, reflecting as it does patterns that have emerged in other studies as regards the tension between such accounts and hegemonic masculinity. However the fact that such references to best friends occurred in less than one in five of the 14-17 year old girls' texts was surprising. In any case at a relational level, the young people's accounts did not suggest that their sense of self was being reflected in and reinforced by individualised best friends. This raises the question as to the extent to which such girls in this area (as in others) are adopting male patterns.

References to a wider group of friends were much more common, particularly amongst the girls, and these can be seen as reinforcing their categorical gendered

identity, in a way in which we have seen friendships between men do in the past (O'Connor, 1992/2002). There was no evidence to suggest that these same sex ties were in any way subordinate to cross gender romantic ones as was suggested in other studies (Griffiths 1988; Griffin, 1985; Thorne, 1993; O'Connor 2002/1992). The implications of such patterns for the maintenance of heterosexual patriarchal control have not begun to be discussed. However, it was striking that, in contrast to their references to same sex friendship, these young people made very few references to opposite sex relationships and those that did refer to them saw them as fun, transitory relationships. However the possibility that such references simply reflect their life stage cannot be excluded.

Individualisation suggests that 'people are removed from the constraints of gender' although there is also the recognition that 'we are situated at the very beginning of a liberation from the feudally ascribed roles for the sexes' (Beck, 1992:105 and 104 respectively). In contrast to what one might expect in late modernity, there was consistent evidence in these texts of the existence of 'two cultures' (see Thorne, 1993 for a critique of this concept) reflected in gender differentiated worlds- such cultures being seen as socially constructed and differentially culturally valued rather than as reflecting essentialist realities. Such cultures were not totally mutually exclusive. Thus there was evidence of boundary crossing, particularly by the girls.

Giddens (1991:14 and 36) suggested that although in a post traditional order part of the question 'How shall I live' is answered in decisions about what to do each day, it was frequently underpinned by practical consciousness that allowed such decisions to be taken for granted. In this context it was difficult to distinguish them from traditional routine activities, other than in situations where their reflexivity was made explicit. As one would expect however what Giddens (1991:74) called 'the practiced art of self observation' did not occur to the same heightened degree amongst the 10-12 year olds as amongst the 14-17 year olds, although this may simply reflect their life stage. However at both ages there was limited evidence of boundary crossing in the boys' narratives, and this combined with the stereotypical content of choices and



other ways of doing boy made it difficult to identify evidence of individualisation. Thus although Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) suggested that individualisation was particularly fraught for women, in the present study it was the girls' rather than the boys' texts that most strongly suggested such individualisation. Such trends are compatible with Inglis' (2003) implicit suggestion that individualisation was most likely to occur amongst those who were outside the hegemonic discourse in Ireland. The feminist struggle in the 1970s and 1980s and the focus on self development and women's education in the 1990s (O'Connor, 1998), created a context within which it was possible for women to reconstitute themselves and their world. Furthermore, they had a structural and cultural rationale for doing so arising from their position in that society. Similar rationales and processes arise in the case of young people-particularly young women. However, reflecting to some extent a lack of attention to gender amongst those concerned with cultural phenomena (e.g. Keohane and Kuhling, 2004; Kirby et al, 2002); and amongst others, a concern with structural issues (e.g. Baker et al, 2004; Lynch, 1999) little attention has been paid to individualisation in Irish society.

This study suggested that Giddens' (1991:2) expectations as regards 'mechanisms which prize social relations free from the hold of specific locales' were for the most part not supported. Furthermore, there was little suggestion in the texts that these young people found 'the massive waves of global transformation ...perturbing (Giddens, 1991:184). Rather as he also recognised as a possibility, what seemed to be happening was that there was 'an intrusion of distance into local activities ' so that 'Although everyone lives a local life, phenomenal worlds for the most part are truly global' (Giddens, 1991:187). Thus for the young people in this study, supporting an international soccer team, using computer games, listening to an Australian pop singer or watching US teen TV was no different than supporting their local football team or going for a cycle in their local area, or indeed simply admiring the view there as a tourist might. These accounts clearly illustrated the extent to which 'Localities are thoroughly penetrated by distantiated influences' (Giddens, 1991:188). Indeed this interpenetration was such that it implicitly raised questions about the usefulness of

distinguishing between the local and the global. Thus although amongst these young people, the local remained an important frame of reference and source of attachment, in most cases it was 'shot through' with global elements, so that for most of these young people, their self identity wove 'elements from different settings into an integrated narrative' (Giddens, 1991:190). In this sense their narratives could be seen as late modern.

A wide range of theorists (including Giddens, 1991; Butler, 1990; Mac an Ghiail, 1994) have stressed the importance of recognising that in Giddens (1991: 63) words 'gender is a matter of learning and continuous 'work' rather than a simple extension of biologically given gender difference'. Intriguingly although these young people did not think of themselves as gendered, gender was a repressed framework underlying their life styles, life choices and their relationships. In these texts the main site for the construction and/or reproduction of doing boy was football. This physical contact, team based sport was compatible with boys construction of themselves in terms of their hierarchical position. Although like the girls, they did not define themselves in terms of gender, and made few reference to heterosexual relationships, insofar as they referred to friendships they focused on side-by-side activity based relationships that arguably affirmed a categorical sense of themselves as male. The importance of their hierarchical position as men in relation to other men in their construction of themselves was underlined by accounts of critical moments that revolved around attempts to establish hierarchical dominance either competitively through football, or physically, through fighting. Although they did not explicitly refer to hegemony, it was implicit in their presentation of themselves as authoritative interpreters of a wide range of economic, political, social and cultural phenomena. In these texts the main sites for the construction and/or reproduction of doing girl were relationships: their family, their side by side activity based friendships and their longstanding intimate best friends. Their critical moments revolved around these relationships and connectedness or its disruption was an important theme. Other sites were also referred to, including American teen TV, pop chart lyrics as well as reading and playing a musical instrument. Their strong and consistent focus on relationships

was also evident in their occupational choices (and indeed has been a consistent feature in Irish Society: Clancy, 2001). This focus is particularly challenging in a small county such as Ireland (population 4.2 million in 2006), since girls are very visibly the high achievers, and a patriarchal state and business elite do not see a relational focus as useful for economic development. In such a context where male life styles and life choices are more highly valued, 'the only available identities were those offered by male stereotypes' (Giddens, 1991:216)

For Giddens (1994: 80) 'Identity is the creation of constancy over time, that very bringing of the past into conjunction with an anticipated future'. This book has been concerned with the way young people reflexively construct their self within a rapidly changing society such as Ireland, which is also one of the most global countries in the world. Cultural influences on constructions of the self in late modernity do not occur in a vacuum. The shape they take is affected by the existing social and cultural context and the constructions of self that are current at that time. Ireland is an interesting case example, since constructions of womanhood are in a recognised flux, and there has been a reluctance to engage with the impact of social change on constructions of manhood. These texts suggest that gender is still a crucially important framework in the construction of young people's sense of self. However young women try to both avoid challenging hegemonic ways of doing boy and to avoid subordination; young men seek arenas to assert hierarchy; and boys and girls come together in fun impermanent relationships. Hence one might suggest that there are limits to the extent to which the self has become a reflexive project in so far as boys and girls drew on (an unrecognised) repertoire of behaviours and attitudes that were gendered.

It has been increasingly recognised that life chances underpin in an unacknowledged way the discourse of life choices and underline the importance of class in terms of economic and political resources as well as prestige (Nilsen and Brannen, 2002). However, gender is also part of that underlying discourse. Furthermore the issue is not simply one of the breaking down of gender-differentiated patterns of behaviour. The

ultimate issue is one the differential value attached to male activities and life styles over those that are female. Overwhelmingly amongst these young people there was no evidence that they saw things in this way. Indeed they seemed not to have noticed that boundary crossing overwhelmingly involved girls, and seemed to have adopted an unthinking acceptance of the higher value attached to behaviours or life styles that were depicted as male.

It is suggested that a key issue in understanding such patterns is that men have managed, through male dominance of key institutions (such as the Church, State, schools, media etc) 'to get a stranglehold on *meaning*. What it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman' (Edley and Wetherell, 1996: 107)-and indeed of the differential value of both. Such structures are not monolithic, nor devoid of resistance. However, such control has perpetuated the differential value attached to men and women. This is of course not peculiar to Ireland. Thus Bjerrum Nielsen (2004a) showed that whether societies purported to endorse gender equality or gender complementarity, a positive male role vis a vis women and a positive valuation of womanhood did not exist.

The accounts of these young people suggested that they were engaged in the reflexive project of the self in the absence of positional and other scaffolds to sustain that project. They had overwhelmingly dealt with the challenge of globalisation by absorbing these influences within their local context. The 10-12 year olds continued to operate with a linear time model, but the 14-17 year olds had greater difficulties in dealing with that future-with some taking refuge in an extended present. Gender (and arguably also class) however remained unrecognised but important realities. Indeed in the case of gender the challenge of emancipatory politics was entirely misperceived as the young women at both ages saw the eradication of the issue as lying in the adoption by them of male life styles and priorities.

This kind of analysis, rooted as it is in a cultural analysis of reflexive constructions of the self, provides a broad context within which more specific social problems

amongst Irish young people can be located (including high levels of suicide, attempted suicide, alcohol consumption, drug use and violence against the person).

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